



Devotion and Obedience: A *devotio moderna* construction of St Bridget of Sweden in Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Manuscript 114

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**Devotion and Obedience: A *devotio moderna* construction of St Bridget of
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Abstract

This thesis analyses the construction of the pious lay female in Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript MS 114, through the example of Saint Bridget of Sweden. MS 114 is a devotional manuscript compiled of nineteen different, individual, articles. These nineteen articles are arranged in two, nearly equal, parts. The first part includes several Birgittine texts whereas the second part provides a more thematic approach, emphasising the virtues of humility, chastity, and overall spiritual obedience. Compiled in the Netherlands, sometime during the early fifteenth century, MS 114's articles were purposely chosen to form a single compilation and was meant to be read as an enhancement of one's devotion.

By analysing the contents of MS 114, its date and provenance, and putting it in the context of the religious movements of its original time and place, this thesis argues that MS 114 was an early manuscript of the *devotio moderna* movement; a religious movement which attracted many lay devotees and particular female members and which emphasised the use of literature and, in particular, of written examples of holy, female lay lives. MS 114 uses the life of Bridget of Sweden, other works about her, and extracts from other theological texts to explore two *devotio moderna* virtues. It considers what chastity means in the context of married lay women and depicts obedience, again with a specific emphasis on the behaviour of women.

This thesis first explores the devotional movement of *devotio moderna*, taking place throughout the Low Countries from the late fourteenth century and

lasting until the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Keeping in mind the context and patterns of *devotio moderna* literature, the second chapter considers the manuscript's date, provenance and contents. Using what was previously known of MS 114, and adding new information, this thesis will argue that MS 114 was an early manuscript from the *devotio moderna* movement.

The final two chapters of this thesis will explore the depiction of Saint Bridget of Sweden as a model of female obedience in MS 114. The articles which are contained in MS 114 present Bridget in a specific way so as to highlight her obedience while minimising any controversial natures historically associated with both Bridget, as a person, but also women in general. Although the manuscript associates Bridget with characteristics of gender-based obedience, it also goes to great lengths to emphasise Bridget's submissive, and correct, use of her voice. The manuscript's decision to not include any of Bridget's revelations, and its purposeful inclusion of only male-authored texts, leaves the reader with an understanding that Bridget was restrained when it came to using her voice. This differs greatly with other historical depictions of Bridget. The manuscript's contents depict a value of silence and control over one's voice to negate any unnecessary speech.

In conclusion, this thesis will demonstrate how the character of St Bridget of Sweden is used in MS 114, to exemplify the ideals of the *devotio moderna* movement, and how *devotio moderna's* understanding of Bridget as a model of obedience influenced *devotio moderna's* later literature on women.

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*This thesis is dedicated to Mary 'Mickey' Martin and Philomena Mederos
Two women who embody the definitions of Love and Strength*

Notes on Citations

At the time this thesis is completed, Bridget's revelations have been translated into English and published in a four-volume set. Each edited volume is also accompanied by comprehensive introductions and notes by Bridget Morris (translation by Denis Searby). To avoid confusion, when citing a specific revelation, the corresponding footnote will follow a standard of 'Revelations, Book Number, Chapter Number' format (example: *Revelations*, III, 34). When citing a part of the introduction or notes by Bridget Morris, the footnote will adhere to a standard, secondary source, footnote of 'Author, Title, Volume, Page Number' (example: Bridget Morris, 'Introduction' in *The Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 1*, 12.) These volumes are, therefore, further listed as both primary and secondary sources within the bibliography.

Introduction

This dissertation places a medieval manuscript of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries in a new historical context. Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript MS 114 has, previously, been understudied and where it has been noticed it has been misidentified. Formally, used only for a few studies focusing on St Bridget of Sweden, it has been considered to be of English provenance, perhaps linked to one of the Birgittine monasteries in England.¹ By noting the manuscript's Dutch provenance and exploring its probable connection to the *devotio moderna* movement, this thesis will consider how MS 114 might have been used in the early years of the movement. It will examine key themes of different explorations of chastity for lay women, and in particular, the nature of female obedience, as portrayed within the manuscript.

This devotional manuscript is made up of nineteen different pieces or extracts from larger medieval works of theology and philosophy. The nineteen articles of the manuscript are arranged in two nearly equal parts. The manuscript's division into two parts is significant to our thinking about how it was intended to be used and read. The first half, which contains Articles 1 through 10, is made up largely of documents relating to St Bridget of Sweden, exploring her life and arguments concerning the legitimacy of her sanctity. Bridget was born in 1303 to Swedish nobles Birger Persson and, his second wife, Ingeborg Bengtsdotter.² Birger was a

¹ For Birgittine supporters in England, see: F.R. Johnston, 'English Defenders of St Bridget' in *Studies in St Birgitta and the Brigittine Order Volume 1*, ed. James Hogg, (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993), 263-75.

² The exact date of Bridget's birth is debatable; it is generally agreed she was born sometime after the New Year in 1303, see: Birgit Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1976), 29-33. Bridget's father, Birger, was probably born in 1265 and Bridget's mother, Ingeborg was probably born after 1275. Päivi Salmesvuori, 'Birgitta of Sweden and her Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela' in *Women and Pilgrimage in Medieval Galicia* ed. Carlos Andrés

Swedish *lagman* (lawman)³ who was described as a generous benefactor of the church and piously practiced confession every Friday.⁴ Bridget's mother Ingeborg was born into the Swedish aristocratic Folkung family but died when Bridget was eleven years old, leaving her to be cared for primarily by her maternal aunt, Katarina Bengtsdotter in Aspenäs, Östergötland until her marriage.⁵ Bridget was the second of seven children but only she, her younger sister, also named Katarina, and her youngest sibling Israel, survived to adulthood.⁶ Not much is known about Bridget's childhood, apart from what appears in her *vita*, the hagiographical account of her life. In the *vita*, Bridget is depicted as having several mystical experiences in her youth. In 1316 Bridget and her sister Katarina were married to brothers Ulf and Magnus Gudmarsson.⁷ Sons of a knight and councillor of state, acting as *lagman* in Västergötland, these two men were also descended through their mother to the aristocratic Folkung family. As a political

González-Paz, (New York: Ashgate, 2015), 113-4; Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 24-6; Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 32.

³ A Swedish *lagman* was an expert in matters of law and jurisdiction, usually in charge of laws within a local province. This practice began at the end of the thirteenth century and continued until around 1347 when King Magnus Eriksson's reign where Sweden obtained its first *landslag* (state law). Salmesvuori, 'Birgitta of Sweden and her Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela', 114n5; Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 67-75.

⁴ Bridget Morris estimates that Birger was born around 1265 as there is record of him in 1280 referring to him as a 'knight, councilor of state and *lagman*'. See: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 32; *A&P*, 472.

⁵ Ingeborg was the daughter of Swedish *lagman* Bengt Magnusson from Östergötland. In some copies of Bridget's canonical *vita* Ingeborg's name is mistakenly given as 'Sigrid', Sigrid was actually Ingeborg's mother. This does not happen with the *vita* in MS 114 as MS 114's *vita* does not specify any names of Bridget's family. Morris gives Ingeborg's death as 21 September 1314. Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 32 n52 & 35; For the genealogies of the family see: Folke Wernstedt, *Äldre svenska frälsesläkter. Ättartavlor utgivna av Riddarhusdirektionem*, (Stockholm, 1957-1965).

⁶ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 35.

⁷ Klockars argues 1316 as the year of marriage for both Bridget and her sister Katarina. According to canon law, the minimum age requirement would have been twelve years, in 1316 Katarina would have just met the minimum age requirement, see: Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 43; Little is known about Katarina after her marriage, apart from a very short testament in *A&P* (p. 65) from Katarina's daughter, Ingeborg. Klockars archival work on Bridget is the best modern source on the subject. Morris' work on Bridget, concerning this topic draws from Klockars' work, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 40n8.

arrangement, these two marriages united a royal bloodline, strengthening the aristocracy of the families as well as the families' economic assets.⁸

This marriage also appears to have been a union based on mutual affection and friendship.⁹ In her revelations Bridget describes a similar model of marriage as her ideal, although she also accepts a clear gender-hierarchy, following St Paul, and advises that the husband should be the master and the wife should obey.¹⁰

According to Bridget's *vita*, she and Ulf spent their first year of marriage in chastity and after this period their sexual relations were prefaced with prayers to God for a child.¹¹ Between the years 1319 and 1334/1341, Ulf and Bridget had eight children, four boys and four girls, six of whom reached adulthood.¹²

After Ulf's death in 1344¹³ Bridget's religious activities became her primary focus.¹⁴ As a form of pious humility, Bridget voluntarily chose a life of poverty, distributing her possessions to her children, the poor, and the church before leaving Sweden in 1349 to make Rome her permanent home.¹⁵ During her residence, Bridget embarked on several pilgrimages, often joined by her children.

⁸ Nieuwland makes this observation as well, and claims because of Bridget's familial standing, Ulf married a woman who was his 'equal'. See: Jeanette Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage: Theory Versus Practice' in *Birgitta, Hendes Vaerk Og Hendes Klostre i Norden*, ed. Redigeret Af Tore Nyberg, (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1990), 84.

⁹ Sources detailing her relationship with Ulf are scarce, Bridget was said to come to love Ulf 'like her own heart.' *A&P*, 479. Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 44-46.

¹⁰ Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage', 87.

¹¹ This part of Bridget's *vita* in MS 114 is missing due to scribal errors, discussed below. It is possible this period of marital virginity lasted several years. Nieuwland argues that Bridget and Ulf did not have intercourse while Bridget was pregnant, showing they only engaged in sex for the sole purpose of procreation. *A&P* 77; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 44-5; Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage', 85.

¹² For an outline on Ulf and Bridget's children, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 46-52.

¹³ This date is given in both the canonical *vita* and on Ulf's gravestone, there is some debate amongst scholars as to whether a more accurate year could be 1346. For this debate, see: Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 240n32.

¹⁴ Bridget receives a 'calling vision' from Christ after Ulf's death, the vision summons Bridget to help in the salvation of others. *A&P*, 80-1; Morris also discusses this time in Bridget's life, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 64-5.

¹⁵ Bridget primary objective was to reach Rome in time for the Holy Jubilee in 1350 to wait for Pope Clement VI, at the time residing in Avignon, to return to Rome as well. To what was surely Bridget's dismay, Pope Clement VI did not return to Rome for the Holy Jubilee.

It was this widowhood which allowed Bridget to gain her greatest significance within the religious social sphere.¹⁶

Only one document within MS 114 is not directly related to Bridget and that is part of the office of the Virgin Mary, to whose cult Bridget was particularly attached.¹⁷ At the end of the fourteenth century, Europe faced a number of troubles. Economically and socially, it was still recovering from the effects of the Black Death (c. 1346-53)¹⁸ whilst, politically, Europe was feeling the effects of the both the Papal Schism (1378-1417) and the Hundred Years War (1337-1453).¹⁹ Amid hostility, and turmoil and the uncertainty within which Europe was locked at this time, there also existed a desire for religious reform.²⁰ This took a number of forms, from the extremism of the flagellants to the practical – if possibly heretical – communities of the Beguines.²¹ Amongst these forms of religious revival, St Bridget of Sweden appeared. She was noted for her outspokenness on religious, political, and social matters, and has further been characterized as the first in a line of late medieval prophetic reformers. Using her

¹⁶ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 142.

¹⁷ Many of Bridget's revelations are given to her through the Blessed Virgin Mary, with these revelations being received throughout Bridget's life. In turn, Bridget's association with the Virgin Mary influenced later medieval women to lead similar devotions, this was particularly true for Margery Kempe. Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (New York: Random House, 1976), 285-98; Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001) 78-108; Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 33; Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Cassell, 2000), 64.

¹⁸ Whilst the Black Death was at its height, was also when Bridget travelled from Sweden throughout Europe and settled in Rome. Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999), 91.

¹⁹ For Bridget's revelations on the Hundred Years War, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 79-82.

²⁰ On the desire for religious reform throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see: Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 55-7.

²¹ On the Beguines, see: Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

prominent religious status, Bridget influenced kings and popes on behalf of God.²² She was also an example of a remarkable lay women. In a period when few women were to be canonized, she provided a pattern of spiritual living which could be extended to women of all classes, and even more importantly, she appealed to all women regardless of their status of maiden, wife, mother, or widow.²³ The value of her example within this manuscript is immense.

The second part of the manuscript is apparently less unified: no individual figure, like Bridget, ties together its apparently disparate pieces. It is made up of extracts from the works of the Church fathers, anonymous theological guidance and sermons from works of the fourth to the fourteenth century.²⁴ However, that does not mean that it has no cohesion. Rather, its different articles are linked by a thematic approach, with themes it picks up on ideas expressed in the manuscript's first part. These two parts are further distinguished by the use of two different scribes. It is both important and interesting to note that these two scribes were working on the manuscript simultaneously, as its second half contains marginal notes, usually corrections of errors in the text, written in the hand of the first scribe. Overall, the nineteen articles contained in MS 114, both those focused around Bridget and those which make no mention of her, emphasize the value of the same virtues: those of humility, chastity, and, particularly, of spiritual obedience in general. These virtues are those of the monastic movements of the

²² Claire L. Sahlin has, specifically, labelled Bridget as a 'fountainhead' who led the way for later prophetic reformers, including Catherine of Siena, Constance of Rabastens, Marie Robine, Jeanne-Marie of Maille, and Joan of Arc. See: Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 12.

²³ For several reasons, largely the political upheaval of the Papal Schism but also the social catastrophe of the Black Death, St Bridget of Sweden was the only woman canonized in the fourteenth century, and the only fourteenth century saint canonized in Rome—all others were canonized in Avignon.

²⁴ This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, however many of these articles are attributed to Early Church Fathers, however, we now know many of these articles are actually Pseudo-written articles from the fourteenth century.

Middle Ages, but in a lay setting. Especially when focused upon lay women, these virtues were espoused by the *devotio moderna* movement. This religious movement emphasized the use of literature and, in particular, the examples of holy, female lay lives. Whereas more popular, and later, *devotio moderna* manuscripts, known as sister books, used *devotio moderna* sisters as these examples for the movement's female lay followers. MS 114 was compiled at a time too early in the movement's history to have deceased sisterly examples. St Bridget is used in MS 114 in a similar fashion to the later sisters of the sister books. Furthermore, the beginning of the *devotio moderna* movement coincides with the canonization of Bridget, therefore showing how *devotio moderna* valued contemporary events within their devotion. The articles in this manuscript, compiled in the Netherlands during the early fifteenth century, were, therefore, chosen with precise care and purpose to form a single compilation meant to be read as part of a whole and intended as an enhancement of devotion and of individual devotional practice.

This thesis takes two of those themes, chastity and obedience, both of which were rooted in the virtue of humility. It will principally consider these through Article 10, the *vita* (saint's life) of St Bridget of Sweden. Bridget's *vita* makes up both the physical and the intellectual centre of MS 114. As a saint's life, Article 10 is also most similar to the later centrepiece of teaching and exempla of the *devotio moderna* movement: the sister book.²⁵

Like those manuscripts and later printed books, the saint's life in general provides stories and anecdotes of the life of a pious individual. Saints' lives

²⁵ Wybren Scheepisma analyses both the physical and literary contents of *devotio moderna* sister books as well as the sisters themselves, see: Wybren Scheepisma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim, and Their Writings*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997).

typically contain a narrative shaped by the linear life cycle of events which demonstrate the saint's spiritual worth and Bridget's *vita* is no exception. In a manuscript, too large for close study within just one doctorate, the *vita* also stands out for the way in which it has been adapted for inclusion in this manuscript. More than one *vita* of St Bridget existed in the early fifteenth century, with the longest, most detailed and best attested being that produced as part of her canonization dossier for the papal curia.²⁶ The version of the *vita* found in MS 114 is recognizably a version of that canonization *vita*: it shares its shape and all the stories told about St Bridget. Yet it is a much-abbreviated version of that work, and the anecdotes considered particularly worthy of inclusion within it are those which emphasise the values of MS 114 as a whole.²⁷ Additionally, the *vita* has been altered to focus more closely upon Bridget herself, rather than placing her in the general context of her life and society. The majority of names, for example, have been removed, leaving only Bridget and one or two saints specified as named individuals.²⁸ This reshaping – or chosen reshaped version, for we cannot be certain whose hand made the alterations here – of the *vita* makes it a particularly clear demonstration of the purpose of the manuscript's compilers. As the story of a lay life well lived, Bridget's *vita* could also be expected to be

²⁶ Bridget's canonical *vita* remains the most popular amongst modern scholars. However, several, significantly, different versions of her life exist in various languages including a popular Middle English *vita* which was particularly popular amongst English Birgittines such as Margery Kempe, see: Roger Ellis, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden: The Middle English Version of British Library MS Claudius Bi, together with a life of the saint from the same manuscript*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Early English Text Society 291, 1987).

²⁷ The most similar published edition of Bridget's canonical *vita* appears in: Marguerite Tjader Harris, ed., *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, transl. Albert Ryle Kezel, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 69-98; A Latin transcription of Bridget's entire canonization proceedings, including her canonical *vita*, has been edited by Isak Collijn, see: Isak Collijn, ed., *Acta et Processus canonizationis beate Birgittae*, (Stockholm/Uppsala: SFSS, ser. 2, Latinska skrifter I, Almqvist and Wiksell, 1924-31).

²⁸ Some of Bridget's close relatives are mentioned, not by given name but rather generically such as 'father's father'.

particularly important for priests and laity of the *devotio moderna* movement in providing teaching about their day to day living. Discussions in this thesis of the manuscript's themes will, therefore, focus around the *vita*, whilst also putting it in the context of the other texts found within the manuscript. Overall the thesis aims to consider what it meant in the religious movements of the early fifteenth-century Low Countries to be obedient and to whom obedience was owed, at different stages in the female lifecycle, considering in particular the nature of control and how this was to be expressed by women.

The Thesis Structure

This thesis contains one contextual chapter, and three analytical chapters, one focussing on the purpose of MS 114 itself followed by two thematic chapters, which explore the contextual and thematic importance of MS 114. The first chapter explores the devotional movement of *devotio moderna*, taking place throughout the Low Countries from the late fourteenth century and lasting until the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.²⁹ Whilst providing an understanding of *devotio moderna*, this chapter also considers the social and devotional mentalities of late medieval Europe. The period that this thesis focuses on, the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, was characterized by a rise of lay piety.³⁰ Late medieval piety was an affective and somatic experience – largely focusing on the imitation of Christ framed by Christ's physical suffering.³¹ Affective

²⁹ John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 5.

³⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 3-4.

³¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 3-4, 13-18; Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in the Late Medieval Hagiography: speaking the Saint*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

spirituality, which was an important concept for the *devotio moderna* movement, is discussed and explained by Caroline Walker Bynum as devotion to the passion of Christ and is a practice of the imitation of Christ.³² *Devotio moderna* utilised the idea of affective piety, focusing on Christ's humanity as a model for what a religious and truly pious life should necessitate. It further bridged both lay and religious societies by not mandating official vows. By remaining both lay and religious, the movement was able to interact with both sectors of societies.

This first chapter will place the movement, which has been largely understudied by historians outside of the Netherlands, in the context of its own historiography, long influenced by Dutch nationalism, as well as in the context of other religious movements of its day which appealed to the laity. In particular, it considers those religious groups whose very appeal to the masses and to the uneducated could mean that they walked the fine line between heresy and orthodoxy; movements such as the Beguines, who were geographically as well as spiritually close to *devotio moderna*, and the Lollards of England. It then traces the early years of the movement itself from its foundation by Master Gerard Grote, the Dutch cleric and theologian of the late fourteenth century, who was convinced that the Church and society had lost its way. His enthusiasm for religious purity as expressed in the communal life which he had seen amongst monastic orders, from the Carthusians to the Augustinians, led him to promote a life of simplicity and to open his own house to poor and unmarried women to live in community. This was the start of the movement of lay sisters who were the backbone of its success. Included as the very last article in MS 114 is one of

³² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 2.

Grote's most famous sermons, which was instrumental in spreading the word of the *devotio moderna* movement. Although he himself did not live to see the full strength of the movement, Grote had established an enthusiasm which his followers were able to take and grow.

This chapter also considers the historical context within which this movement arose and flourished. In a time of wealth, when it was a centre of important trade links, the Netherlands and Low Countries were able to receive and to spread new ideas. Additionally, the growing literacy of the Low Countries in this period encouraged, and made good use of, *devotio moderna*'s emphasis of the written word. Books, at first in Latin, and then later in the vernacular as the first wave of priests gave way to more of the lay members whom the movement encouraged, were both a way of encouraging members of the movement to make their own livings through printing (Grote spoke out against begging, as practiced by the mendicants) and a way to teach the movement's aims.

Teaching, both children and adults, was a fundamental aim of the *devotio moderna* movement. An important part of the movement's literature was the sister book, which both provided the individual with a pattern by which to live and created a sense of the community. This chapter explores the nature and values of the sister book and then the values and aims of the movement's women. These were women who lived without vows, sometimes within communities of the movement's adherents but also within their own families and secular networks. For these sisters, who were central to the movement, there was, again, an emphasis upon literacy, and the value of the written word, and upon the virtues of chastity, humility and obedience which the sister books taught. This thesis's first chapter concludes by noting how *devotio moderna* included several practices

which allowed it to be considered new and innovative for its time, and by paying particular attention to its views of obedience and its understanding of gender within its own society. It is this first chapter which sets the historical background and context for the remaining chapters. By highlighting several of the important themes and concerns, this chapter will provide understanding for how MS 114 is a *devotio moderna* manuscript. This initial background will then continue with the second chapter which introduces the manuscript as a physical object and its literary contents.

With the historical context established in this first chapter, chapter two of this thesis examines in detail the manuscript which is its focus: Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 114. It considers both the physical properties of the manuscript and its contents to provide the immediate context for the final two, thematic, chapters of this work. This second chapter thus sets up the manuscript context which will be necessary in order to explore the thematic elements appearing in the manuscript, discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Two begins by analysing the manuscript's physical characteristics. It provides a description of the size and construction of the manuscript, offering an overview of its contents. It also considers the manuscript's scribal history: noting that whilst two scribes were involved in the manuscript's construction they clearly worked upon it concurrently, making the manuscript as a whole a coherent piece despite its collection of apparently eclectic material, particularly in its second half, rather than a collection of smaller booklets and quires obtained by chance. Dismissing earlier attempts to give names to these scribes as based on a misunderstanding of the manuscript's contents, the chapter considers the historiography of the manuscript in relation to its date and provenance. The chapter demonstrates

conclusively that the manuscript came from the Netherlands, a conclusion reached both through its scribal hands and through the use of seventeenth century material about the purchase of the manuscript by Dean Honywood of Lincoln, during his exiled residence in the Netherlands. It also takes the varying dates for the manuscript and demonstrates that they are based on only a limited reading of its contents. This dissertation places it in the early fifteenth century. These conclusions place the manuscript within the right time and place to be a *devotio moderna* piece.

The chapter then moves to a consideration of the contents of the manuscript itself. Beginning with the first half, it considers the history and importance of St Bridget of Sweden as an individual, tracing her life as a wife and mother and her political involvement as a widow, including the Revelations for which she was famous – written works in which she corrected kings, queens and popes claiming that Christ was speaking through her. It contrasts this with her presentation in MS 114 where the challenging saint known for the use of her voice and her speech with powerful people has become a demure woman, who values silence and who is largely shown as present in the home. This makes her an example of female obedience which the chapter both links to its consideration of this virtue in chapter one, in the context of the *devotio moderna* movement, and which it considers in the context of other parts of the manuscript. These include, in particular, the defence of St Bridget written by Adam Easton, an English Cardinal, answering accusations that her speech and revelations were neither divinely inspired nor suitable for a woman, and the support of her visions offered by Alfonso of Jaén. Both of these works place Bridget's life within the context of Christ's life on earth, emphasizing her humility and obedience to God in her

speech and her actions. The chapter then considers in detail the virtues which are demonstrated by the Bridget of the *vita* of MS 114, demonstrating the parallels between these and the virtues of *devotio moderna*. Finally, the chapter traces the place of these virtues in the second half of the manuscript, particularly in the sermon of *devotio moderna*'s founder, Grote, which concludes the manuscript, and in the inclusion of a sermon concerning Mary Magdalene once attributed to the Early Church Father, Origen. Both emphasise the value of humility and obedience, whilst the sermon on Mary Magdalene – an unusual choice – provides another female exempla to compare with St Bridget in the manuscript. The chapter then places the manuscript in the right historical and intellectual context to be a product of the *devotio moderna* movement.

The final two, thematic chapters explore the depiction of Bridget as a model of female obedience in MS 114. Focusing on those articles contained in the first half of the manuscript, and supplementing with the virtuous themes presented in the second half, these final two chapters will look at Bridget as an obedient woman (according to her gender) and how the idea of speech and silence are characterized as Christian obedience. Firstly, there is a discussion of gender and chastity. *Devotio moderna* was not a movement which expected or encouraged formal vows of chastity, but it did encourage chaste living. Bridget's *vita* demonstrates how chastity could be achieved by the wife as well as the virgin or the widow. Bridget's gendering, however, created challenges for other reasons. Therefore, the chapter also considers how the tensions around the female mystic and authoritative spiritual speaker – and the parallel attempt to describe her in ways which could masculinise or neutralise her gender – were at war with *devotio moderna*'s need for a clearly female example for their sisters to imitate. Secondly,

the role of obedience, the core value of the movement, is discussed in an exploration of silence and the female voice. Every article within MS 114 was male-authored, and this factor gives a male-authority to any female voice depicted within the manuscript. Bridget, in contrast to her depiction in her famous revelations, is presented as demure and silent throughout the manuscript. Chapter Four thus considers the use of the voice by the obedient woman of the later Middle Ages, as explored particularly in MS 114 in Bridget's *vita*.

Choosing to first focus on gender, this third chapter discusses the ideal construction of gendered obedience that Bridget embodies within the manuscript. While the core of the chapter relies on the construction of Bridget as presented in MS 114, this is paralleled with depictions of Bridget found in her revelations. This chapter begins with the idea of gender, but quickly evolves to incorporate ideas of sexuality and the physical body. *Devotio moderna* closely identified with the bodily suffering of Christ and used this form of affective piety to create their own form of a devotional, pious, lifestyle. The female physical body, however, often brought with it negative connotations.³³ The construction of Bridget minimizes these physical associations and replaces them with spiritual associations. To do this, this chapter examines Bridget's life as a maiden, wife, and widow, and considers the presentation of Bridget throughout the first part of the manuscript. Whilst beginning this study on the manuscript's thematic characteristics, this chapter will show how the themes in this manuscript were integrated to become one whole rather than a random assortment of readings.

³³ Dyan Elliott explores sexuality, physicality and the negative ideas which were associated with the medieval body, see: Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

The *vita*, Article 10 of MS 114, provides a number of anecdotal stories of Bridget's three life stages: virginity, marriage and widowhood. Bridget, although a married woman, demonstrated the spiritual ideals of marital chastity, and her chaste widowhood made her a model of Christian womanhood. Her sexual activity during her marriage, therefore, became less problematic because she appropriately approached marital sex. In the first half of MS 114, Bridget's construction both as a saint and as a pious woman is at the fore, although not infrequently attempts to marry these two identities fail. Bridget's gender was seen as a handicap for her role as spiritual leader; as a woman, she could be seen as in a position of weakness in comparison to masculine strength. To offset this disadvantage, it was essential for her to be seen to adhere to a certain set of standards in the *discretio spirituum* or the discernment of spirits. While the authors of those texts included in MS 114 could attempt to soften the potency of Bridget's femininity, perhaps even going as far as to neutralize her gender, ultimately her womanhood could not be erased. Alfonso of Jaén's defense of Bridget's piety demonstrates this: his consideration of Bridget's knowledge is put in a masculine context, but he cannot entirely overlook her gender and he makes use of her womanhood – her wifely and maternal experiences – to place her within an already established tradition of holy women. Her gender could be both an advantage and a disadvantage for her apologists. Through these texts the societal tensions which concerned their authors are reflected, in considering all Bridget's experience of all the female life stages as well as shifting trends in perceptions of holy women. Before the twelfth century, female saints were primarily virgins and martyrs, or indeed both. By the fourteenth century, lay devotional habits had come to be focused on Christ's humanity and suffering.

Society's new focus on Christ's human life led, by extension, to a greater focus on his mother: the Virgin Mary. These shifting trends gave a new spiritual value to motherhood. This provided a way for authors who were constructing her as a saint, to praise Bridget for her behaviour during, and her response to, each of her life stages.

Bridget's contemporary reputation as a pious woman was often challenged and her claim to religious authority was seen by some commentators to be incompatible with the necessary behaviour of the pious female, as the early articles in MS 114 demonstrate. One answer to this criticism was to present Bridget in a gender-neutral form, neither male nor female as saint and visionary. Yet the manuscript also attempts to present Bridget as a model of womanhood. As an early *devotio moderna* manuscript, it seeks to use Bridget's *vita* in the way in which later sister books would be used, as a pattern for a pious female life. Bridget's example was used to portray a praiseworthy life, one in which she was a young unmarried woman, a wife and mother and also the Bride of Christ. Bridget thus needed to be presented as an accessible, pious woman as well as as a saint. The form of the *vita* used within MS 114, made up of a selection of stories drawn from the canonization *vita* produced for Bridget, emphasises her role as a woman within a different, more domestic, context.

A late medieval woman's sexual habits were closely connected with her obedience. Her body, and therefore her sexuality, were largely seen as the source of her inferiority and should therefore have led to her subordination to the male sex.³⁴ An unmarried woman was expected to remain a virgin, a married woman

³⁴ Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, 'Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology' in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* Ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 218.

should pay the marital debt owed to her husband, whilst a widow, unless she remarried, should remain chaste.³⁵ Bridget's demonstrations of obedience are an important part of her presentation within the *vita*. The expression of this obedience is the subject of Chapter Four. A close reading of Bridget's *vita* within MS 114 demonstrates that the use of the voice – and the withholding of speech, the use of silence – is an important part of discussions of obedience. This had been the case in medieval theology almost from the start – St Paul had urged women to be silent in church and the contrast between Eve, who brought about the fall, and Mary who aided in mankind's redemption was often described in terms of speech. Mary's 'yes' to God's instructions delivered through the Angel Gabriel demonstrated her obedience just as surely as Eve's speech with the serpent and her vocal tempting of Adam expressed her disobedience. Bridget's own obedience – to her elders as a child, to her husband as a wife, and to God alone as a widow – is shown as particularly entwined with her understanding of vocal control. Silence is a mark of obedience, certainly. As examined in Chapter Four, both Bridget and her grandmother are rewarded for their acts of silence. Yet Bridget's *vita* demonstrates that the opposite can also be true: it can be acceptable, even necessary, for a woman to speak including as correction and admonishment, to guide a sinner towards God. She must also understand when to stop speaking: Bridget guides a sick monk to the point of confessing a long-hidden sin. But she must then step back and allow him to make that confession to a priest. Both she and the monk must recognise the limitations of her use of her voice. The *vita* makes it clear that control of speech is something which can and should be learnt

³⁵ For a succinct discussion on medieval sexuality see: Ruth Evans, 'Introduction: What was Sexuality in the Middle Ages?' in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Middle Ages Vol. 2* ed. Ruth Evans, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-36; Gail Hawkes, *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 43.

as a girl, that it must be practised as a wife, and that, it is possible, for a widow who has practiced silence earlier in her life, to be used as a conduit for Christ, and to speak publically and with authority over not only men but also the devil. As a widow, Bridget is depicted as having full control over her voice, and a complete understanding of the times of necessary silence and those when she must speak. But this control has been the result of long practice. Bridget is described as having control over her voice at the very earliest age, as she learns to vocalise, to speak, for the first time, and as, literally, a bridge between the two worlds, as a spiritual guide and frail, female humanity.

Despite the careful construction of Bridget and her voice in MS 114, and elsewhere, her role as Christ's bride and channel was often challenged. The strongest argument that detractors had against Bridget's legitimacy as a saint and spiritual leader was that no woman would have divine authority to speak as Bridget did. Outside the *vita* in MS 114, there are a significant number of articles which defend God's choice to give a woman, Bridget, these particular gifts of inspired speech. In contrast to the Bridget of her revelations the *vita* shifts Bridget into line with the norm of a traditionally obedient woman. This chapter's conclusions demonstrate how vocal control was of vital importance for the manuscript's role within the *devotio moderna* movement.

Conclusion

A manuscript of the size and complexity of Lincoln Cathedral MS 114 needs more than one doctoral thesis to discuss its contents in full. Nevertheless, this dissertation places, for the first time, this early fifteenth-century manuscript from the Netherlands within its historical context. It both identifies that context

and explores the ways in which the themes of obedience and chastity could be expressed by the *devotio moderna* movement in its early days. It argues that the compilers of MS 114 used the constructed character of Bridget within the *vita*, supplemented by other material within the manuscript to explore the importance of control of sexual behaviour and of the voice for the pious female. It is these forms of control which allow lay women to practice chastity and obedience which were of central importance to *devotio moderna*. The parameters which define this thesis further dictate its chapter structure. The first chapter provides a brief background of the *devotio moderna* movement. A devotional movement beginning in the late fourteenth century, and lasting until the beginning of the Reformation, and remained localised to the Low Countries in urban developments. The movement was able to take advantage of the growing urban wealth and economies which, in turn, allowed for growth amongst literacy in both men and women. Providing this historical background information on *devotio moderna* is essential to this thesis because, as is proven in Chapter Two, MS 114 can be identified as an early *devotio moderna* manuscript. Whilst keeping this *devotio moderna* background in mind, Chapter Two primarily focuses upon the physical characteristics of MS 114 and the recurrent themes which can be found within its varied content. The carefully crafted manuscript's use of St Bridget of Sweden as an exemplar of pious lay female life provides a demonstration of what the original compilers of the manuscript wanted to communicate about chastity and obedience amongst medieval women.

This construction of Bridget as a literary character within the MS 114's *vita* is the main focus of the final two chapters. The construction of Bridget's gender was considered carefully not only by the articles' authors but also in the

early fifteenth-century by the compilers of the manuscript. This is particularly clear in those articles concerning St Bridget. The original authors of these articles – men such as Adam Easton and Alfonso of Jaén, had aimed to present a spiritually obedient and acceptable candidate for canonization, whereas the compilers of MS 114 were more concerned with constructing a model of female obedience for their readers. The compilers choice of a reconstructed and reshaped *vita* for the manuscript was central to an understanding of these issues. With this, this thesis will show how St Bridget of Sweden was altered and constructed in such a way as to present the, fifteenth century, devotional ideal of womanhood.

Chapter One

Devotio Moderna and Fifteenth-Century Devotion

Introduction

This chapter discusses *devotio moderna*,³⁶ a popular devotional movement of the Low Countries which lasted from the end of the fourteenth century up to the mid-sixteenth century and which provides the context and background for the manuscript study in this thesis.³⁷ This particular devotional movement provides an understanding of the social and devotional mentalities of late medieval Europe. This period has been characterized by a rise of late medieval lay piety across Europe.³⁸ With emphasis on an affective form of piety imitating Christ's, bodily, suffering (*imitatio Christi*) patterns of lay devotion shifted from what they once

³⁶ The Latinized spelling of *devotio moderna* will be used throughout this thesis rather than the Anglicized 'Modern Devotion'. Within English-language scholarship 'modern devotion' has previously been the chosen translation. However, this translation is misleading. 'Moderna' can, and has, been translated as: new, renewed, or present day. Alternatively, Albert Hyma has used the term 'Christian Renaissance' to refer to *devotio moderna*, and while this term is perhaps the most relevant to this thesis, it has rarely been used by scholars since Hyma introduced it in 1924. American scholar John Van Engen refers to the members of *devotio moderna* as 'new devout', but this too limits our understanding. The Latin term '*devotio moderna*' was developed as an expression of the movement's members' belief in their own 'conversion' to spiritual devotion rather than secular life in their day-to-day activities. Therefore, because of the various ways this term is translated, I have chosen to maintain the original Latinized '*devotio moderna*'. For a discussion on the translation of *devotio moderna*, see: John Van Engen, 'The Practices of *Devotio Moderna*' in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009, 10-11; Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance: A History of Devotio Moderna*, 2nd Edition (Hamden: Archon Books, 1965).

³⁷ Deciding when *devotio moderna* ended is debatable, but this is the generally accepted date and aligns with the start of the Protestant Reformation. Hyma specifically dates *devotio moderna* as lasting between 1380 and 1520 whereas John Van Engen says that the movement ended later, in the 1560s, see: Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 6-7; John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 5.

³⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum aptly discusses this shifting trend: '...the period from 1100 to 1518 [was] "the emergence of lay spirituality"—that is, the increasing diffusion outward into society from the monastery of religious practices and values and a new willingness to define roles in the world as having religious significance.' See: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 3-4.

were.³⁹ The expression of personal devotion through entry into structured religious houses which formally dominated the European scene throughout the twelfth and thirteenth century was transformed and renewed with these changing trends. The English Lollards (Wyclifittes), initially led by John Wycliff in the mid-fourteenth century held a variety of different beliefs, but generally asserted a disassociation with the contemporary fourteenth-century Catholic church.⁴⁰ Similarly at the same time, the Hussites of Bohemia followed the religious leadership of John Hus, who also challenged formal religious structures. These devotional movements, along with *devotio moderna*, began to alter religious devotion throughout Europe. This chapter will make use of the pre-existing scholarship on *devotio moderna* to focus on the effect the movement had on both lay and religious fourteenth and fifteenth-century society. It will argue that *devotio moderna* included several practices which allowed it to be considered new and innovative for its time, and will pay particular attention to its views of obedience and its understanding of gender within its devotional circles.

Modern study of *devotio moderna*

Devotio moderna was, or at least was an attempt at, a ‘Christian Renaissance’ – a rebirth of past Christian behaviour and belief – in that it sought monastic reform and a return to an in-depth, study of the central legal and devotional Christian text, the Bible.⁴¹ Collectively, the movement included the organized

³⁹ Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 2; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 13-18.

⁴⁰ Andrew E. Larsen discusses the labelling of ‘Lollard’. See: Andrew E. Larsen, ‘Are All Lollards Lollards?’, in *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England* eds Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003) 59-72.

⁴¹ In his introduction, Hyma states that: ‘...this “New Devotion”, or Christian Renaissance, between 1380 and 1520, absorbed the wisdom of the ancients, the essence of Christ’s teachings, the mystic religion of the fathers and the saints of medieval Europe, as well as the learning of the

religious orders of the Brotherhood of the Common Life; the Sisterhood of the Common Life; and the Augustinian Canons Regular of the Congregation of Windesheim, but it also included devout individual members of lay society.⁴²

With the dawn of the Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic officials chose to set aside the practices and achievements of *devotio moderna*.⁴³ Because the movement had remained relatively localised within the Low Countries, modern academic interest in the study of the movement has also remained mostly localised within that same area. John Van Engen describes this lack of more general, modern scholarship in terms of scholars ‘pass[ing] over’ *devotio moderna*, both in a cultural and linguistic sense; and instead choosing to study more accessible lay movements, such as the Lollards of England, or other ‘more interesting’, religious movements.⁴⁴ This omission, however, means that scholars are ignoring an important part of the development of lay religious feeling in the West from past, and current, historiography.

While *devotio moderna* was emerging on the Dutch religious scene, there were indeed similar movements developing throughout Europe.⁴⁵ The Lollards,

Italian humanists; ... assimilated all these ingredients and presented them in a new dress to the old world and the new.’ Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 6-7.

⁴² *Devotio moderna* has primarily been understood as a Low Countries and Northern German movement, and the focus of this thesis will remain within the Low Countries and Northern Germany. There is, however, evidence of *devotio moderna* influencing Syon Abbey in England (c. 1420) and Syon Abbey closely resembled the Dutch Chapter of Windesheim, located south of Zwolle near Deventer. See: M.E. James, ‘Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion 1536’ *Past and Present* 48 (1970) 54; R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism*, (Turnhout: Brill, 1968), xi; For a history of the female-religious of Windesheim see: Wybren Scheepssma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).

⁴³ Charles Caspers, Daniela Müller, and Judith KeBler, ‘In the Eyes of Others. The Modern Devotion in Germany and the Netherlands: Influencing and Appropriating’ *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013), 489.

⁴⁴ John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 4.

⁴⁵ Swanson gives a succinct background of European medieval devotional movements, in R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c. 1515*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 309-61.

centred mostly in England, claiming to be the followers of Wycliffe, were wary of the Church's claims to authority and argued that judgment was reserved for God alone, challenging common views on saints, pilgrimages, confession and the mass, and possibly having a slight political influence.⁴⁶ Wycliffism has been labelled as 'deeply reactionary' to other movements. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, for example, specifically refers to Wycliffism's use of the flexibility of female leadership.⁴⁷ The Hussite movement, made up of men and women described as the 'Czech exponents of Wycliffite ideas' followed Czech reformer Jan Hus in the late fourteenth century – later their ideas fed into what became known as the Bohemian Reformation.⁴⁸ Historians of both movements are manifold.

Devotio moderna, by contrast, has remained a largely understudied movement, attracting only minor attention amongst English-language scholars. This is predominantly a result of linguistic constrictions as a large amount of identified *devotio moderna* literature was written in Middle Dutch.⁴⁹ Furthermore, because it

⁴⁶ The Lollards held the position of 'no authorization in scripture for canon law', see: Dyan Elliott, 'Lollardy and the Integrity of Marriage and the Family' in *The Medieval Marriage Scene: Prudence, Passion, Policy*, eds Sherry Roush and Cristelle Louise Baskins, (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 38-9. For more on gender and the Lollards, see: Shannon McSheffery, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in the Lollard Communities, 1420-1530*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). For Lollards and their literature, see: Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite texts and Lollard history*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). On orthodoxy of the Lollards, see: Robert Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Eciam Lollardi: Some Further Thoughts on Fiona Somerset's "Eciam Mulier: Women in Lollardy and the Problem of Sources"' in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* eds Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 267.

⁴⁸ Elliott, 'Lollardy and the Integrity of Marriage and the Family', 50.

⁴⁹ There are many reasons why *devotio moderna* literature was produced in the vernacular rather than Latin, these reasons will be discussed in greater length throughout this chapter. However, as a quick summation, growing literacy rates and a greater inclusion of women within the devotional movement, who were more likely to have been schooled in the vernacular, added to a growing devotional book culture; all with a vernacular demand. The following short selection of literature discuss *devotio moderna* and literature, with the latter two focusing on female readership in the Low Countries: Thom Mertens, 'The Modern Devotion and Innovation in Middle Dutch Literature' in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context* ed. Erik Kooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226-241.; Thérèse de Hemptinne, 'Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550) in *The Voices of Silence: Women's Literacy in a Men's Church* eds Thérèse de

remained a local movement, scholastic attention has arisen amongst from Dutch and German scholars for whom it represents a nationalised or localised history. Early scholarship on *devotio moderna* began in the nineteenth century when Dutch scholars saw the movement as one of the driving forces behind the Reformation and a mark of progression into the modern era.⁵⁰ Dutch historian Mathilde van Dijk attributes this approach to the movement's study to the Dutch feeling of being 'levelheaded' – an attribute which, these historians felt, was reflected in the movement – and the corresponding nationalistic feelings nineteenth-century historians exhibited.⁵¹ Van Dijk's views are still being echoed in recent scholarship: Caspars, Miller and Kebler stated as recently as 2013 that, '...the roots of the national character of the Dutch lie in the Modern Devotion, with its emphasis on common sense and straightforwardness.'⁵²

There has, however, been some work in English upon the subject. Albert Hyma's 1924 *The Christian Renaissance* was the first modern, English-language, monograph to be published on the movement.⁵³ Hyma's enthusiastic pride in his

Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 111-126.; Geert Warnar, 'Tleven ons heren Jhesu Christi: Female Readers and Dutch Devotional Literature in the Fifteenth Century' in *Saints, Scholars and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies*, eds Mathilde van Dijk and Reneé Nip, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 25-42.

⁵⁰ C. Ullmann, *Johann Wessel der Hauptrepräsentant reformatorische Theologie im 15ten Jahrhundert nebst den Brüdern vom gemeinsamen Leben namentlich: Gerhard Groot, Florentius Radewyns, Gerhard Zerbolt und Thomas von Kempen und den Deutschen Mystikern: Ruysbroeck, Suso, Tauler, dem Verfasser der Deutschen Theologie und Staupitz in ihre Beziehung zur Refomation* (Gotha 1866), lx and 561; For a survey on the Protestant Reformation beginning with the late medieval church, see: Andrew Johnston, *The Protestant Reformation in Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵¹ Mathilde van Dijk, 'The *devotio moderna*, the Emotions and the Search for "Dutchness"' *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* vol. 192-2 (2014), 20-41. 21. Van Dijk also ascribes the Dutch feeling of 'level-headedness' to older scholarship's reasoning for the lack of revelations in *devotio moderna* sister books; feeling any mention of the supernatural interfered with this common Dutch characteristic. See: van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies' in *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the church* eds Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 240-1.

⁵² Caspers, et al. 'In the Eyes of Others' 489-90; Also see: Frits van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1300-1400* (Amsterdam, 2013), 485-511.

⁵³ Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance: A History of Devotio Moderna*, 2nd Edition, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1965).

Protestant Dutch-American heritage manifests itself in his central argument that Europe's formative turning point from the medieval to the modern era lies within the *devotio moderna* movement as it set the stage for the Protestant Reformation.⁵⁴ Hyma recognized both the similarities and the differences in the Northern Renaissance and Italian humanism movements, noting that unlike Italian humanism, the Northern Renaissance movement generated specifically religious reform.⁵⁵ From 1925-1952 a considerable amount of research inspired by Hyma's was conducted on *devotio moderna* and its connection with humanism, however, the early interest in *devotio moderna* initiated by Hyma would lull until another scholar with Dutch roots would continue the scholarship.⁵⁶

Forty years later, R.R. Post's *Modern Devotion* (1968) followed Hyma's fundamental work. Disagreeing with Hyma's enthusiastic approach to the movement, Post responded to that earlier work by presenting what he understood as the 'facts'. Post interpreted the 'Devotionalists' (that is those who became a part of this movement) as 'monastic' and 'quasi-monastic' figures, localised within the Netherlands who were, 'ascetic, sober-minded, safely medieval and pious, devoid of any link to Renaissance, Reformation or the new world.'⁵⁷

Hyma and Post's work are both still considered essential texts for the study of *devotio moderna*. Post's more recent work is generally viewed as more reliable than Hyma's earlier work. Hyma's work, more often than not, is seen as being too

⁵⁴ Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 3.

⁵⁵ Albert Hyma also noted that at the end of the Middle Ages, the Low Countries and Italy were similar in the fact that they were both more 'opulent and more blessed with artistic and scholarly progress than any other regions in Europe.' See: Albert Hyma, 'Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 8 (1954), 99.

⁵⁶ As mentioned earlier, a primary restriction on contemporary *devotio moderna* scholarship was language based. This contributed to the lull in scholarship after Hyma. Hyma, 'Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany', 99.

⁵⁷ This is Van Engen's analysis of Post's work. I maintain that Van Engen is correct, however, and his view informs the present thesis. See: Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 3; Post, *Modern Devotion*.

emphatic and Dutch-nationalistic. This nationalism is, indeed, a theme which is found repeatedly, even today, in the work of Dutch scholars who strive to connect *devotio moderna* with the celebration of their ‘distinctive contribution to spiritual and educational renewal.’⁵⁸ Van Dijk has described this national identification amongst Dutch historians with their past history as an example of *lieu de memoire*, defining it as a, ‘construction of a historical phenomenon as being typical for a group’s identity.’⁵⁹

Devotio moderna, as a subject of history, lacks a secure place within historical studies.⁶⁰ As a movement, *devotio moderna* was neither Catholic nor Protestant and thus was not accepted in the history of either religion. It was lost amongst the centuries of historiography, and yet neglected by both medieval and early modern scholars.

While Dutch scholarship, then, is both our main way into the movement and partially exaggerates the role *devotio moderna* as the forerunner to the Reformation, it is nevertheless certain that this movement had a significant impact upon Dutch society, and that it affected both fourteenth and fifteenth-century religious devotional practices. The remainder of this chapter will continue to explore *devotio moderna*’s impact on devotional society within the Low Countries. From its early beginnings, and under various male leaders, *devotio moderna* experienced a sense of success within its relevant society. The rise of literacy amongst urban communities, and the pragmatic approach these new urban

⁵⁸ Usually Post’s work is considered the more reliable of the two as Hyma’s scholarship retains a sense of ‘awe’, and nationalistic pride, with Dutch history. Of course, Post also held the benefit of hindsight as his work was, largely, a response to Hyma’s work which was published several decades before. American scholar Jan Van Engen briefly discusses the two different approaches to *devotio moderna*. See: Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 3-4.

⁵⁹ Mathilde van Dijk, ‘The *devotio moderna*, the emotions and the search for ‘Dutchness’’ *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* vol. 192-2 (2014), 21.

⁶⁰ This is how John Van Engen, an American scholar of *devotio moderna* since the 1990s, explains the subject of *devotio moderna*, see: Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 4-5.

societies took to learning and literacy, aided not only in the growth of the movement, but also in the growth of devotional literature production.

Furthermore, as we shall see, the inclusion of women within *devotio moderna* affected every part of this movement and has left contemporary scholars with a wealth of, relatively understudied, literature to explore as an aid to better understand Late-Medieval devotional societies.

Creating *devotio moderna*

In this context of limited scholarship, it is, then, necessary to give an historical context and background to the movement. Master Geert Grote has traditionally been acknowledged as the founder of the *devotio moderna* movement.⁶¹ A master and learned theologian, Grote eagerly promoted men and women's conversions to what he thought of as a truly pious lifestyle.⁶² Grote was born in 1384 in Deventer, a city near Utrecht, Netherlands, and spent several years studying at the University of Paris.⁶³ He was a cleric, and upon his return to the Low Countries, he was granted a prebend within the diocese of Utrecht. This provided him with a secure income and some degree of status. Grote's university education went beyond the seven subjects of the liberal arts, and gave him a superb understanding of canon law. He later used this to his advantage in defending *devotio moderna* against claims of heresy, a fate which had befallen other

⁶¹ There are several spellings of Grote's first and family names, including: Gerard, Geert, Gerrit, Gerhard, Grote, Groote, Groet, and the Latinised title: Gerardus Magnus.

⁶² For a study on Grote's life and religious beliefs, see: Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 51-175. For a biography on Grote, see: Theodore P. Van Zijl, *Gerard Groote, Ascetic and Reformer (1340-1384)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963); Frans A. Van Liere, 'Groote, Gerard (1340-84)' in *The Late Medieval Age of Crisis and Renewal, 1300-1500* ed. Clayton J. Drees (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2000), 200-2.

⁶³ Wybren Scheepma, 'Writing, Editing, and Rearranging: Griet Essinchghes and Her Version of the Sister-Book of Diepenveen' in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue* eds Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 277.

movements which inspired lay enthusiasm and piety, including the Beguines before him as well as his Lollard contemporaries in England.⁶⁴

Grote believed strongly that humankind had lost its way. His experience amongst the Carthusians of Munnikhuizen, where he made close friendships with several religious men, showed him the 'evils' which he thought were undermining the Church.⁶⁵ Grote believed that the Carthusians were the only monastery community not in need of reform.⁶⁶ Grote's close ties with the Carthusians would be further seen in the structure of the Brothers and Sisters of Common Life as well as the Augustinian canons of the Windesheim Congregation. The original constitution of the Brothers of Common Life – and the rule at Windesheim – were significantly influenced by Guigo I's *Consuetudines Cartusiae* and both Grote and his successors would use Guigo I's *Meditations* to influence their sermons read amongst the Brothers and Sisters of Common Life.⁶⁷ Furthermore, although not unique to either community, both the Carthusians and devotio moderna utilised book-copying as vocational-labour within their societies. Additionally, in comparison to the Carthusians, Grote described men of the church as hypocritical, immoral, greedy and self-indulgent.⁶⁸ This inspired him to create what became

⁶⁴ Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With special emphasis on the Belgian Scene*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 572; Theodore P. Van Zijl, *Gerard Groote, Ascetic and Reformer (1340-1384)*, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 1963), 1-2.

⁶⁵ Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 13.

⁶⁶ For Grote's views on monasticism, see: Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 51-66; For Grote and the Carthusians, see the following: Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 9.; Otto Gründler, 'Devotio moderna atque antiqua: The Modern Devotion and Carthusian Spirituality' in *The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, Cistercian Studies Series 55 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 40-3.

⁶⁷ Jon Derek Halvorson, *Religio and Reformation: Johannes Justus Lansperger, O. Cart (1489/90-1539), and the Sixteenth-Century Religious Question*, Unpublished Ph.D., (Chicago: Loyola University Chicago, 2008), 57-8.

⁶⁸ Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 13.

known as *devotio moderna*, but his outspoken criticisms also created anxieties within the ecclesiastical world.

Grote was particularly unpopular amongst the mendicants, as he denounced their practice of begging.⁶⁹ He endeavoured to follow a ‘complete conversion’, Christ-like, lifestyle by giving up his secular, ecclesiastical stipend, which was by then made up of two prebends and their income.⁷⁰ He was further inspired by the Deventer vicar, Hendrik Stappe, who had bequeathed his house to pious women in Deventer.⁷¹ In the spring Grote to open his home to poor, unmarried women and to choose to confine his living space to only two small rooms within his house.⁷² Through this lifestyle as a new convert, Grote attempted, by practicing what he saw as a humble and Christ-like penance, to atone for what he now felt was his previously selfish lifestyle. This idea of a ‘conversion’ in imitation of Christ, as well as learning to purge past impurities, provided a range of subject matter for his enthusiastic sermons, as he encouraged others to imitate his ‘conversion’ and to live humbly and Christ-like. Amongst his more widely-known sermons, Grote warned about the pursuit of gain and used his own past experiences regarding benefices. He found that the more he gained, he also gained a greater burden which affected his spiritual life.⁷³

By the late 1370s, Grote’s popularity for preaching had grown. He was well known in smaller towns, such as that of Zutphen, but also in the larger cities

⁶⁹ Clifford Hugh Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2001), 283.

⁷⁰ This most likely occurred in the early 1380s. For more on this period of Grote’s life, see: Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 10-5.

⁷¹ Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 5; O. Nubel, *Mitterlaterliche Beginen und Sozialsiedlungen in den Niederlanden ein Beitrag zur Vorgechichte der Fuggeri*, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 209-15.

⁷² This occurred on 20 September 1374, see: Scheepsma, *Medieval Women in the Low Countries*, 5; Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 11.

⁷³ Grote, ‘Resolutions and Intentions, but Not Vows’, in *Devotio Moderna* ed. John Van Engen, (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 65.

of Amsterdam, Delft, Deventer, Gouda, Haarlem, Kampen, Leiden, and Zwolle. According to Grote's biographer, Thomas à Kempis (d. 1471), his public preaching gathered crowds and filled churches.⁷⁴ Grote's popularity as a public preacher caught the attention of the Bishop of Utrecht who then invited him to speak in front of the assembled Synod of the diocesan clergy at Utrecht on 14 August 1383.⁷⁵ He gave a sermon on this occasion entitled *sermo contra focaristus*, in which he preached against concubinage amongst the clergy. This subsequently became one of Grote's most famous sermons. Despite the sermon's popularity with lay audiences, his stance on clerical marriage angered many clerics and eventually forced Grote's disbarment from any official preaching.⁷⁶

Part of this movement was encouraging lay women to live an ordered, spiritual life. Once Grote had opened his home to poor and unmarried women, on 13 July 1379, he formalized his efforts by creating an official charter for 'Meester-Geertshius', or 'Master Geert's house'.⁷⁷ This charter carefully stressed that his purpose was not to create a new religious order: without papal approval, this would have been heretical. It also stressed that his home was not a home for beguines, a lay female movement sometimes considered to be of dubious orthodoxy.⁷⁸ The women who gathered there were later considered to have been

⁷⁴ Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With special emphasis on the Belgian Scene*. New York: Octagon Books, 1969, 572; Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 12-3.

⁷⁵ It is unclear why the Bishopric of Utrecht summoned this synod; as synods were usually convened by the Church to decide on particular issues, discipline, or doctrine. It is possible the Bishop felt his diocese had a problem with priests living with women or, at least, it was an issue he felt especially important. This particular sermon is one of the articles contained within Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114. See: MS 114 fos 111v-115v. Also, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

⁷⁶ Dick Akerboom, 'Spiritual Leadership in an Age of Uncertainty: Geert Grote and the Modern Devotion', in *Leadership and Christian Identity*, eds Doris Nauer, Rein Nauta and Henke Witte, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 58.

⁷⁷ Scheepma, *Medieval Women in the Low Countries*, 5.

⁷⁸ Albert Hyma, 'Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 8 (1954), 102n8.

Grote's first adherents to *devotio moderna* and were the precursors and then first members of the Sisters of the Common Life. It was felt to be necessary for women seeking a devotional, yet secular, life to have proper clerical guidance.⁷⁹ Grote fulfilled this role.⁸⁰ At the same time, he began the Brothers of the Common Life, the male counterparts to the Sisters of the Common Life, made up of Grote's colleagues and disciples.⁸¹ Both the Brothers and Sisters remained 'unprofessed' – that is they made no oaths to live a common life even though they were often seen as the equivalent of quasi-monastic religious orders – and they lived on income generated by their own manual labour. Grote was determined that his *devotio moderna* would be an improvement on the beguine movement.⁸² He strictly forbade begging, or mendicancy, and preached that the manual labour they performed was not only necessary for their subsistence, but was also what allowed the Brothers and Sisters to gain inner purity.⁸³ He sought for himself, and for his followers, affective pious devotion with an intense focus on the interior self and the individual's relationship with Christ's humanity.⁸⁴ This 'quest for the

⁷⁹ It was the gender and uncontrollable nature of women which was of concern and therefore in need of proper observation. The role of gender in devotion, both the obedient and the feared, will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁸⁰ Scheepsma discusses this factor particularly with reference to the Beguines and Hendrik van Leuven, a learned Dominican, although the same principal held true for Grote, see: Wybren Scheepsma, 'Hendrik van Leuven: Dominican, Visionary, and Spiritual Leader of Beguines' in *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500* eds Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 271-2.

⁸¹ The year *devotio moderna* started is often debated. R.R. Post records it as 1379 while Van Engen gives a looser date of 1380s. See: Post, *The Modern Devotion*, x; Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 1.

⁸² Grote understood the Beguines failure lay in their lack of proper spiritual guidance. See: van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 244; Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communitites in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 19-34, 118-20.

⁸³ Van Engen, 'Late Medieval Anticlericalism: The Case of the New Devout' in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds Peter A. Dykema and Heiko Augustinus Oberman, (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 22.; Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With special emphasis on the Belgian Scene*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 572; Scheepsma, *Medieval Women in the Low Countries*, 5.

⁸⁴ There was an intense focus on Christ's suffering, especially the passion. Herman Roodenburg, 'Empathy in the Making: Crafting the Believer's Emotions in the Late Medieval Low Countries', *Low Countries Historical Review* 129 (2014), 46.

individual' self and his 'disillusionment with the traditional structures of the monastic orders' were the foundation blocks of *devotio moderna*.⁸⁵ The Sisters and Brothers began by meeting secretly in the 1380s, but by the 1390s their houses became established and were 'a recognised reality' amongst Dutch society.⁸⁶

In 1384, after Grote had denounced mendicant practices and following his sermon of clerical criticism at the Synod, dismayed mendicants and members of the secular clergy complained to the bishop of Utrecht. The bishop then had no other choice but to forbid any future preaching by Grote. By this time *devotio moderna* had already begun to find its place as a more general religious movement. In this same year, however, Grote died of the plague, and the leadership of the movement passed on to his close followers,⁸⁷ and co-founders of the Brothers of Common Life: Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt.⁸⁸ Although Grote did not live to see *devotio moderna* past its beginnings, Radewijns and Zerbolt ensured the movement's continuation not only in the Low Countries but throughout Germany.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 283; Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 12.

⁸⁶ These secret meetings were a haven to practice their devotion away from prying eyes who would label them as heretical. Often called 'congregations' or 'gatherings' they were spoken in both Latin and the Dutch-vernacular, often to hear Grote preach. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 12.

⁸⁷ Who should be described as Groot's successor is a matter of uncertainty and debate. Jan van den Gronde has been credited with the spiritual leadership of the Sisters of Common Life after Grote's death, whereas Thomas à Kempis describes Florens Radewijns (d. 1400) as Grote's successor. See: Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe*, transl. Dennis Martin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 47; Scheepsma, *Medieval Women in the Low Countries*, 5; M.J. Pohl, ed., *Thomae Hemerken a Kempis Opera Omnia*, Vol. 7, (Freiburg, i.B. 1902-22), 176.

⁸⁸ Both Radewijns and Zerbolt were converted to a pious lifestyle by Grote. Radewijns lived a life of pleasure before being challenged by one of Grote's sermons and giving up his canonry, whereas Zerbolt was schooled in Latin at a Brother of Common Life School and later became known for his mystical writings. Both men were partially responsible for encouraging *devotio moderna* interests within religious and secular learning. Hyma, 'Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany', 100.

⁸⁹ Kenneth Strand, 'The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey' in *The Dawn of Modern Civilization: Studies in Renaissance, Reformation and Other Topics Presented to Honor Albert Hyma*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand, 2nd Edition, (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1964), 342.; For the most comprehensive treatment of the Brethren of Common

Urban Environment

Devotio moderna flourished amongst fourteenth century society. The movement's success largely drew upon its geographical position within the Low Countries. Located near main marine waterways and centrally placed between Northern and Central Europe, the position of the Low Countries allowed them to become a prime centre of trade, whilst also encouraging an influx of international ideas on devotion to permeate Low Country society.⁹⁰ The largest density of *devotio moderna* communities was concentrated within the towns with their developing international business trade, and the success of this international economy heavily influenced its characteristics.⁹¹ These business trade networks, collectively known as the Hanseatic League, were a commercial merchant guild focused within the market towns along the coast of Northern Europe. The Hanseatic League was responsible for shaping the urban areas into the modern version of the Low Countries and it dominated the Baltic maritime trade from c. 1400-1800.

Life in Germany, see the four part series: William M. Landeed, 'The Beginnings of the *Devotio Moderna* in Germany (Part I)' in Vol. XIX, *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, (1951), 162-202; Landeed, 'The Beginnings of the *Devotio Moderna* in Germany (Part II)' in Vol. XIX *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, (1951), 221-253; Landeed, 'The Beginnings of the *Devotio Moderna* in Germany (Part III)' in Vol. XXI *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, (1953), 275-309; Landeed, 'The Beginnings of the *Devotio Moderna* in Germany (Part IV)' in Vol. XXII *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, (1954), 57-75.

⁹⁰ It is impossible to use modern geography to explain the origins of *devotio moderna*, however the most accurate way to refer to the area which *devotio moderna* inhabited is the Low Countries. Of course, some influence of *devotio moderna* breached other places of Europe, but the majority was within the Low Countries. Although, is often narrowed down further to just the Netherlands. This thesis will cover aspects of *devotio moderna* in all areas of the Low Countries and Northern Germany. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, we know MS 114 (the central focus of this thesis) was purchased in the seventeenth-century in Utrecht, and therefore it is most probable MS 114 was a Dutch manuscript.

⁹¹ Although the monetary success within the Netherlands' society pushed for growing literacy, *devotio moderna* was not exclusively a movement of the wealthy.

Trade between the Low Countries and Italy dated from the 1270s, when Italian bankers set up branches in Bruges.⁹² The Flemish cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ypres⁹³ flourished in wool trade and mercantile exports, whilst Holland had merchant cities such as Amsterdam, Dordrecht, and Leiden, amongst others.⁹⁴ The cloth trade of the southern Low Countries produced cloth of such exquisite quality that it was valued as far away as Novgorod, Russia.⁹⁵ Economically speaking, close proximity to major international trade routes resulted in Dutch urban areas being overwhelmed with wealth. Along with trade in goods came a trade in cultural and influential ideas. Ideas concerning religion encouraged a climate of religious debate, which then furthered *devotio moderna*'s status to develop as an urban religious movement.⁹⁶ This was due to more than just the influx of new ideas. The economic situation within the Low Countries cultivated a new urban bourgeoisie class who were, therefore, able to afford to contribute to the rise of

⁹² Margaret Spufford, 'Literacy, trade and religion in the commercial centres of Europe' in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, eds Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 248. Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam, 'Introduction', in *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, eds Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam, (New York: Palgrave, 2004), xii.

⁹³ There were long-standing tensions between town and country (rural) industries within these three cities. Rural, country manufacturing of wool dated from before 1300. This country's economic style threatened international export trade within the urban setting. The city of Ghent was able to acquire the rights of wool production within a five-mile radius around the town, with Ypres following a similar pattern. Bruges' mercantile economy sought to preserve its international trade. For a discussion on the tensions between town and country economics within these three cities and the accompanying policies, see: David Nicholas, *Town and Countryside: Social, economic and Political tensions in Fourteenth-Century Flanders*, (Bruges: *De Tempel*, 1971), 207-209.

⁹⁴ Holland's proto-industry was developed quite differently from Flanders as it lacked the sharp contrasts Flanders saw between town and countryside. See: Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'A Third Road to Capitalism? Proto-Industrialisation and the moderate nature of the late medieval crisis in Flanders and Holland, 1350-1550' in *Peasants into Farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages-19th Century) in light of the Brenner Debate*, eds Peter Hoppenbrouwers and Jan Luiten van Zanden, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 89.

⁹⁵ Kittell and Suydam, 'Introduction' in *The Texture of Society*, xii.

⁹⁶ This was a characteristic they shared with the mendicants. However, I hesitate to draw connections between the two movements as *devotio moderna* disagreed with many of the mendicant's principles; primarily begging. Spufford, 'Literacy, trade and religion in commercial centres of Europe', 232-3. Also, see: Alan Everitt, 'The English Urban Inn', in *Perspectives of English Urban History* ed. Alan Everitt, MacMillan, (New York: MacMillan, 1973), 91-138; Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 1, 207-209.

devotio moderna's intellectual culture. The growing, and newly wealthy, society found a popular demand for spiritual and religious ideas and practices.⁹⁷ Literature was deemed to be an essential tool used in reforming the lives of new devotionalists, and with a new growing urban elite both literacy and book ownership flourished.⁹⁸ A growth in literacy was encouraged, and, importantly, monitored, first by Grote and then later by his successors who saw it as essential for those who pursued the true meaning of devotion as they taught it.⁹⁹ For women, literacy was encouraged, and highly desired. Male devotional leaders, such as Grote and Zerbolt, decided what was acceptable for women to read. Much of this caution was in order to disassociate the movement from the beguines and any claims of possible heresy.¹⁰⁰ *Devotio moderna*, like other medieval devotional movements, aspired to spiritual perfection, and to restoring the purity of humankind, which had been lost at the Fall.¹⁰¹ Aiming to return to the purity of the Early Church, the movement sought to imitate the lives of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, and of the Desert Fathers.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Hyma, 'Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany', 99; J. de Jong, 'Het karakter en de invloed van de Moderne Devotie' in *Historisch Tijdschrift*, IV (1925), 26-38.

⁹⁸ Scheepsma, 'Mystical networks in the Middle Ages? On the first women writers in Dutch and their literary contacts' in *'I have heard of you' Foreign Women's Writings Crossing the Dutch Border: From Sappho to Selma Lagerlöf* eds Susan Van Dijk, Petra Broomans, Janet F. Varden Meulen, Pim van Oostrum, transl. Joe Nesbitt, (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004), 50.

⁹⁹ Joke Spanns, 'Reform in the Low Countries' in *A Companion to the Reformation World* ed. R. Po-chia Hsia, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 118.

¹⁰⁰ Scheepsma points out that women were classed as *illiterate* because they did not possess the same education in theology as most religious men. As such, they were not able to read anything they wanted, rather this was censured by men such as Zerbolt or Grote. Along a similar note, Ruth Mazo Karras remarks that not only did university education exclude women, but the 'content of learning excluded women as well: theological education did not so much as transmit misogynist teaching as it used women as symbols to discuss other issues.' See: Scheepsma, 'Mystical networks in the Middle Ages? On the first women writers in Dutch and their literary contacts', 50-1; Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Using Women to Think With in the Medieval University' in *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200-1550* ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 21.

¹⁰¹ van Dijk, 'Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen', 247.

¹⁰² van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 243.

Life in *devotio moderna* resembled that of other contemporary devotional movements, and like those other movements, *devotio moderna* changed over time. Some of its characteristics, initially set out by Grote, were retained throughout its existence. In the last years of his life (c. 1380-84), Grote wrote *Ad Beguttas*, a tract objecting to the practice of selling 'prebends' (in this context set paid incomes or pensions) within Beguine convents.¹⁰³ Grote had strongly denounced any reclusive or mendicant life style, and these prohibitions stayed with *devotio moderna* after his death. His strong opposition to any form of begging is reflected particularly within the constitutions of the Brethren houses at Deventer and Zwolle where specific work by members of the house is mentioned.¹⁰⁴ Rather than beg, adherents of *devotio moderna* supported themselves with their own manual labour. This echoed Beguine practices: the Beguines also opposed begging and instead favoured manual labour.¹⁰⁵

This manual labour came in various forms, including the production of textiles, which was a significant component of their labour. However, their culture was also affected by and included the copying of manuscript books.¹⁰⁶ Adherents of *devotio moderna* spent a considerable amount of time performing this labour. It was considered especially appropriate work by the movement as it both facilitated

¹⁰³ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 204n76; Grote, *De Simonia ad Beguttas. De Middelnederlandsche tekst opnieuw uitgegeven met inleiding en aantekeningen*, ed. W. de Vreese (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1940); A.G. Weijler, 'Geert Grote en begijnen in de begintijd van de Moderne Devotie', *OGE* 69 (1995): 114-32.

¹⁰⁴ For both of these houses, the constitutions specify 'priests and clerics' will live in the houses supported by 'their own labor, namely the copying of books and by the returns of certain estates.' See: Strand, 'The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey', 343. For the Deventer constitution, see: Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 441-474. For Zwolle, see: Michael Schengen, ed., *Jacobus Traiecti alias de Voecht Narratio de inchoatione Domus Clericorum in Zwoilis* (Amsterdam: J. Muller, 1908), 239-273.

¹⁰⁵ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 85-7.

¹⁰⁶ Armgert van Lisse from Diepenveen is an example of a woman from Diepenveen who spent hours of required labour copying books for the convent, see: Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Netherlands*, 65 & 65n55.

teaching and taught in itself: as Wybren Scheepisma notes: ‘it provided the opportunity for building a well-stocked library, and...during the hours he was engaged in copying, the scribe was continuously exposed to religious literature.’¹⁰⁷ *Devotio moderna*’s interest in copying manuscripts extended into the fifteenth century up to the advent of the printing press. Within the movement, books, writing, and literacy carried a ‘fundamental significance’ for what they considered to be ‘spiritual renewal’ in all areas of Christian life.¹⁰⁸

Printing provided the movement with a new way to teach and to propagate its message. The Brotherhood of the Common Life’s active interest in promoting the success of printing extended to establishing four of the earliest-known working presses in Europe.¹⁰⁹ Deventer, in particular, expressed a demand for new books in numbers which surpassed those of some of the larger cities.¹¹⁰ Both Deventer and Zwolle experienced a surge in printing, including the printing of textbooks on subjects which were expected to come within the interests of *devotio moderna*.¹¹¹ Amongst works printed here, were a large number of a ‘practical’ religious nature,

¹⁰⁷ Scheepisma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 65-6 & 66n56.; On book production, see: T. Kock, *Die buchkultur der Devotio Moderna. Handschriftenproduktion, Literaturversorgung und Bibliotheksauflbau im Zeitalter des Medienwechsels*, Frankfurt am Main: Studien zur Modernität des Mittelalters 2. And for the spiritual aspect of copying books, see: N. Staubach, ‘Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit in Bereich der Devotio moderna’ *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 25, (1991), 418-61.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Bollmann, ‘Being a Woman on my Own’ Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as Reformer of the Inner Self’ in *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 70.

¹⁰⁹ Strand, ‘The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey’, 341-2.

¹¹⁰ The following are statistics for the total number of books printed in the fifteenth century, followed by the number of books which contained classical Greek or Latin works: Overall Total: 1705, 177; Utrecht: 67, 12; Zwolle: 102, 14; Louvain: 251, 24; Leiden: 32, 0; Haarlem: 20, 0; Gouda: 86, 1; Ghent: 11, 1; Deventer: 508, 90; Delft: 138, 4; Brussels: 28, 1; Bruges: 30, 1; Antwerp: 350, 29; Alost: 19, 0. These statistics are given in: Hyma, ‘Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany’, 100.; M.M. Philips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance*, Revised 2nd Edition (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1981), 43.

¹¹¹ Strand, ‘The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey’, 344, esp. 344n17.

along with a sizable quantity of classical, secular, works.¹¹² In Brussels, the Brothers of the Common Life established the earliest-working printing press in the city, one which continued in active production from 1475-1487, producing approximately forty different works during this period. As Kenneth Strand points out, the importance of this work is demonstrated by the fact that the next working press in Brussels did not materialize until Thomas van der Noot established one in 1507.¹¹³ It is a sometimes-overlooked fact that *devotio moderna* leaders encouraged the production of both religious and secular texts to serve their combined thirst for piety and learning.¹¹⁴

The first wave of *devotio moderna*, in the 1380s mostly consisted of clerics and priests who were unhappy with the ‘superficiality and pursuit of wealth and possessions, which characterized life in the modern town.’¹¹⁵ Rather than this superficial life which they felt had come to characterize the fourteenth-century church, *devotio moderna* sought a ‘pure’ life of devotion to God within a like-minded community. With this came the *devotio moderna* idea of ‘conversion’. This was not understood as converting non-Christians to Christianity, although this would have been welcomed. Rather, it focused on a literal ‘turning toward’ a new way of life, which valued stricter adherence to spiritual practices and emulating the life of Christ.¹¹⁶ The idea of conversion also became a significant

¹¹² Strand, ‘The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey’, 345; Hyma, ‘Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany’, 100.

¹¹³ Strand, ‘The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey’, 346.

¹¹⁴ Hyma, ‘Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany’, 99-101.

¹¹⁵ Scheepsma, ‘Writing, Editing, and Rearranging’, 278.

¹¹⁶ Throughout the rest of this chapter, unless otherwise noted, references to ‘conversion’ will use this definition. For an English translation of Brinkcerinck’s sermons, see: Van Engen, ‘John Brinkcerinck on Conversion’ in *Devotio Moderna*, 223-30. For the Middle Dutch version, see: Moll, ‘Acht collaciën van Johannes Brinckrinek’, *Kerkhistorisch archief* 4 (1866) 111-21. The Middle Dutch for ‘conversion’, as Van Engen puts it is ‘bekeerynge/zich keeren’, see: Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 28-9.

part of *devotio moderna* sermons – both the Brothers and Sisters of Common life understood this conversion to be their foremost priority. These ideals were later echoed within the significant work, *Imitation of Christ*, written by one of the movement's foremost members.¹¹⁷ This work allowed *devotio moderna* to pursue the purification of spirituality and led humanity towards spiritual perfection.

Devotio moderna's concern with 'conversion' is further seen in the Brothers' involvement in the education of young boys, largely those coming from the new, urban, business families, who came to study at grammar schools.¹¹⁸ The Brothers of Common Life sought to educate talented young boys, perhaps with the rather obvious intention of recruiting new followers to the movement. There is some dispute as to whether or not the first Brothers were directly involved in teaching at these schools. Early *devotio moderna* was less concerned about education or establishing new schools, and, those early followers focused their efforts on reforming monasteries.¹¹⁹ The new schools however demonstrate the movement's concern with the literacy of the laity, which will be discussed in the next section.

¹¹⁷ *Imitation of Christ* is mostly credited to the authorship of Thomas á Kempis; this has been debated. Albert Hyma argues Kempis was only a compiler, not an original author. See: Hyma, 'The Original Version of 'de Imitatione Christi' by Geard Zerbolt of Zutphen' in *Archief voor de Geschiedenis van het Aartsbisdom Utrecht*, vol. 69 (1950), 2-41; Hyma, *The Brethren of the Common Life*, 145-194; For Hyma's edition: *The Imitation of Christ by Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950). Also, see: Strand, 'The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey', 342 n.7. It is also important to note that not all scholars agree with Hyma, some, including Jacobus van Ginneken attribute the work to Gerard Groote.

¹¹⁸ van Dijk, 'Wolves Become Lambs: The Conversion of Lukewarm Religious and Worldly Clerics in *Devotio Moderna*' in *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics in Conversion*, eds Jan N. Bremmen, Wart J. van Bakkum and Arie L. Molendijk, (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 61.

¹¹⁹ Geert Groote, *Gerardi Magni Epistolae*, ed. W. Mulder (Antwerp, 1933), 310-21; Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 48.

Literacy and Devotion

Devotio moderna focused upon education at all levels and was an enthusiastic creator and copier of literature with a spiritual focus. Encouraging literacy and reading was a central part of the movement in the 1400s. Over the course of the fifteenth century the Brotherhood of Common Life became more active in the new ‘pedagogical boom.’¹²⁰ There is agreement amongst scholars that the Brothers were unusually active in furthering education.¹²¹ This is exemplified within the chapter school at Deventer, which already had an established curriculum in several disciplines of the *quadrivium*, made up of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, a curriculum which Grote extended even further.¹²² Additionally, convents, such as Diepenveen, provided a limited amount of instruction to girls.¹²³ Furthermore, the attention given by *devotio moderna* to printing and manuscript production reflected the interest they had in education. While *devotio moderna* might not have had a large presence in Europe as a whole, its influence on the culture of the Low Countries was widespread.

Interest in educating society did not halt at Grote's death. Florens Radewijns (d. 1400), a *devotio moderna* leader of the second wave, showed special concern for the welfare of schoolboys, not only concerning himself with the local male youths but also ensuring lodgings for those coming from outside the city.¹²⁴ Three branches of *devotio moderna* came together to encourage support for education. First were the Brothers and Sisters of Common Life. These

¹²⁰ Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 48-9 & 49 n17.

¹²¹ Hyma, ‘Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany’, 99-104.

¹²² Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 47.

¹²³ On average, convents had a higher level of education than sister houses. Scheepsma, ‘Writing, Editing, and Rearranging’, 279-80; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 43-5.

¹²⁴ Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 47.

were lay communities, and while technically separate, they could be, and often were, considered as one. Second, came the Windesheim Congregation and the Augustinian canons regular. Third were the rectors and teachers in the new Latin schools in the cities which were linked to the Brothers of the Common Life and acted like a student hostel.¹²⁵

Educating the youth was important for two reasons. Firstly, *devotio moderna* held great stock by the idea that education bred understanding. They strongly believed that it was necessary to understand devotion in detail in order to gain a true experience of devotion, all the while striving to include young boys and women within their movement. Secondly, it was a way of maintaining numbers within the movement. By educating the youth, the Brothers hoped to prepare the next generation to become future Brothers and Sisters and lay-members of *devotio moderna*.¹²⁶ Some, like Brinckerinck who took a leading role in the movement after Grote's death, endeavoured to appeal to the young urban population rather than the aged, widowed, or indigent.¹²⁷ In this way, he hoped to prepare youths to be in an acceptable spiritual state when they reached an older age. There was a traceable learning hierarchy which began with reading, and was followed by meditation, and then finally by prayer (*lectio, meditatio, oratio*). These were fundamental practices in the medieval Church in general, but were particularly explored and focused upon amongst the laity as well as clerics in *devotio moderna*.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 49n17.

¹²⁶ Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 47; *Thomae a Kempis Opera*, ed. Pohl, vol 7, p. 176.

¹²⁷ Brinckerinck's sermons at Diepenveen were conducted in Dutch to appeal to the lay audience. Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 77.

¹²⁸ This instruction of '*lectio, meditatio, oratio*' seen in fifteenth-century Dutch devotional manuscripts instructing their readers the proper instructions on how to meditate. See: Warnar, '*Tleven ons heren Jhesu Christi: Female Readers and Dutch Devotional Literature in the Fifteenth Century*', 33; N. Staubach, '*Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit im Bereich der Devotio Moderna*', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 25 (1991), 418-61 (pp. 435-36).

Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380-1471), a *Devotio moderna* follower, and generally accredited author of *The Imitation of Christ*, was, as a youth, educated in Deventer by the Brothers. He provides an example of their work. Thomas was a canon regular whose work became popular throughout Europe's devotional circles. While *The Imitation of Christ* was his most widely known work, he also wrote several biographies of *devotio moderna* members, including Grote himself, Floris Radewijns, John van de Gronde, and John Brinckerinck.¹²⁹ Thomas, along with several of his fellow classmates, had contact with the Brothers as a young boy, and it was this early contact which encouraged the boy's 'zealous' attraction to the movement.¹³⁰ Thomas became a canon regular of the monastery of St Agnietenberg, before becoming part of the Windesheim congregation.¹³¹ It was not only the men who were interested in passing on the practices of *devotio moderna* to their society. The Sisters exerted great influence on the lay people of Dutch society.¹³² The Sisters of the Common Life far outnumbered the Brothers, both in physical numbers but also in numbers of houses.¹³³ Education was central for both the male and female members of the movement.

As the Low Countries' commerce and urban business elite grew richer, so too did encouragement of literacy: a statistic reaching across both class and gender borders.¹³⁴ Urban literacy particularly rose significantly higher compared

¹²⁹ Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 166-70.

¹³⁰ Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 521.

¹³¹ Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 521.

¹³² van Dijk, 'Wolves Become Lambs', 61.

¹³³ For a discussion on the specific numbers of Sisters, see: Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 125-137.

¹³⁴ Boys, both rich and poor, received basic education including both reading and writing. Kittell and Suydam, 'Introduction' in *Texture of Society*, xii; Also, de Hemptinne notes that literate women of the urban higher and middle classes were 'by no means exceptional.' de Hemptinne, 'Reading Writing, and Devotional Practices,' 114; Philip E. Bennett, 'Female Readers in Froissart: Implied, Fictive and Other', 13-23.

to rural literacy rates.¹³⁵ This was largely due to business growth in urban areas and an ‘urban need for high literacy, and numeracy skills’ in a practical sense.¹³⁶ Margaret Spufford discusses this ‘urban need’ for literacy amongst the Low Countries’ population by breaking it into two different groups with two different needs. First, is the need amongst merchants, bankers, and others within places of commerce. Literacy was a necessary skill in order to ‘function effectively in a world of national, and international trade.’¹³⁷ Second, according to Spufford, was ‘the drive for literacy to serve salvation in the Protestant tradition’.¹³⁸ Spufford’s choice of these two literacy needs is important, however she limits her argument in declaring that it was the Protestant tradition which brought about the urban need for literacy amongst the Protestant church. We see this urban need for literacy growing prior to the advent of Protestantism, and we can see this was especially true amongst *devotio moderna* members. Spufford unapologetically declares that her argument is based upon commercial and religious reasons, and it was the commercial need for literacy which had the most force in growing urban literacy rates.¹³⁹ It was the practical need of the commercial industry to be literate which spurred those who could afford it to educate their children, and this created

¹³⁵ It is worth mentioning, as the topic of this thesis breaches the early actions of the Protestant Reformation, Protestant populations tended to also have higher literacy rates in comparison to Catholic areas. Spufford, ‘Literacy, trade and religion in commercial centres of Europe’ in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, eds Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 230.

¹³⁶ Spufford, ‘Literacy, trade and religion in commercial centres of Europe’, 230.

¹³⁷ Margaret Spufford notes the world of national and international trade was opened up in Italy from the thirteenth century, Margaret Spufford also provides further examples of various business professions found it necessary to be able to read, see: Margaret Spufford, ‘Literacy, trade and religion in commercial centres of Europe’, 230; Also, see: Peter Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe*, 251-63.

¹³⁸ Spufford, ‘Literacy, trade and religion in commercial centres of Europe’, 231.

¹³⁹ According to Margaret Spufford’s research, the one exception she has found is the example of Lutheran Sweden where religion was enforced by the state. See: Spufford, ‘Literacy, trade and religion in commercial centres of Europe’, 232. In the same edited volume, see: Wiebe Bergsma, ‘Church, state and people’ in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* eds Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 196-228.

a new generation of literate Christians. This commercial need for a literate population also allowed for more personal investment in the buying of both bibles and devotional books. Whereas this was previously seen as a privilege to be reserved for clerics and religious houses, these urban literate populations now had the resources, and the desire, to participate in a literate and knowledge driven culture.

As *devotio moderna* was centred in these same urban towns the movement was able to take advantage of a newly literate population and expand their own devotional practices.¹⁴⁰ This afforded the movement the chance to engage with theology and the classics, and its leaders encouraged engagement with both Latin and the vernacular, as they established their schools and dormitories.¹⁴¹ They were not alone in encouraging education. The Low Countries, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also saw a growing bourgeoisie class who valued education because of the growing international business trade and the opportunity for economic advancement.¹⁴² For example, fourteenth-century Brabant and Flanders were both considered to be ‘hubs of literary life’ with high literacy rates amongst their urban populations. In fact, society saw literacy rates rise during this century and the next as the demands for trade and industry grew.¹⁴³

Economic advancement, of course, was not the reason *devotio moderna* sought to educate, rather the movement’s members were spurred on by their belief

¹⁴⁰ Hussites in Bohemia also took advantage of the spread of literacy. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515*, 79; For a discussion on urban literature throughout the Low Countries, see: Pleij, ‘The Rise of Urban Literature in the Low Countries’ in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context*, ed. Erik Kooper, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 62-77.

¹⁴¹ Strand, ‘The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey’, 342-3.

¹⁴² Scheepsma, ‘Writing, Editing, and Rearranging’, 279.

¹⁴³ Pleij, ‘The Rise of Urban Literature in the Low Countries’, 62.

that understanding aided the growth of true devotion. By harnessing the eagerness for education, which this economic development engendered, they had a forum for spreading their beliefs to a new devoted generation. Thérèse de Hemptinne argues women played a role in the development of ‘pragmatic literacy’, beginning in the Low Countries, during the thirteenth century.¹⁴⁴ Katharina of Naaldwijk, canoness at the Windesheim cloister of Diepenveen, could read and write Latin, and later became a canoness. Her parents had intended her to marry, demonstrating that some women from privileged backgrounds intended only for a secular life were also able to receive a Latin education.¹⁴⁵ The business-minded laity and religious communities were able to take advantage of each other’s desires for educational advancement to promote their own wants.¹⁴⁶

This societal need for practical literacy explains why *devotio moderna* literature was primarily in the vernacular. Early *devotio moderna* manuscripts were in Latin, but by the fifteenth century a majority were being produced in the vernacular for greater inclusion of readership.¹⁴⁷ This choice was largely influenced by the sheer number of women who joined *devotio moderna*. From the beginning Grote was involved in translating sermons and scripture into the vernacular so the female members of *devotio moderna* could extend their devotion through their reading.¹⁴⁸ Greater literacy meant greater dissemination of *devotio*

¹⁴⁴ Pleij, ‘The Rise of Urban Literature in the Low Countries’, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Thérèse de Hemptinne, ‘Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550)’ in *The Voices of Silence* eds Thérèse de Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora, Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, 113n7; Mathilde van Dijk, *Een rij van spiegels: De heilige Barbara van Nicomedia als voorbeeld voor vrouwelijk religieuzen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000) 71.

¹⁴⁶ Scheepsma notes how all branches of *devotio moderna* were able to profit from the education advancement was found throughout the urban towns of the Low Countries, see: Scheepsma, ‘Writing, Editing, and Rearranging’, 280.

¹⁴⁷ On *devotio moderna* Middle-Dutch literature, see: Mertens, ‘The Modern Devotion and Innovation in Middle Dutch Literature’, 226-141.

¹⁴⁸ Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 97-8.

moderna religious ideals and a greater dissemination of knowledge. By choosing to have the majority of their literature produced in the vernacular, *devotio moderna* showed their engagement with a changing society. Some early texts did remain in Latin but were later translated into the Dutch vernacular to ensure greater accessibility.¹⁴⁹ With growing vernacular literacy amongst both men and women, and their penchant for sticking to quasi-monastic ways, *devotio moderna* made their movement a social movement as well as a religious devotional movement.

When retrospectively looking at the reasons for *devotio moderna*'s success, literacy growth rates amongst both men and women are an essential issue to consider and are seen as a 'tool for the reconstruction of the inner self.'¹⁵⁰ The Low Countries from the fourteenth through to the sixteenth centuries saw a surge of emphasis placed on education, both within *devotio moderna* in a religious context but also within lay society. Attention to both the religious context of *devotio moderna* and to lay societal practices should therefore be studied in tandem as the two were not as separate as one might think. Within the Low Countries' cities of Bruges, Ghent and Ypres, advanced school systems in the vernacular developed.¹⁵¹ The end of the thirteenth century had already witnessed elementary schools organised within each parish of Bruges where reading, writing, arithmetic, and French were taught to both boys and girls.¹⁵² This culture of schooling further developed in the fourteenth century with 'private' schools

¹⁴⁹ We see this happening with the *Tleven ons heren Jhesu Christi*, a translated Dutch manuscript of the Latin *Vita Christi* completed in 1438. This particular manuscript has been discussed within the context of female book ownership. See: Geert Warnar, 'Tleven ons heren Jhesu Christi: Female Readers and Dutch Devotional Literature in the Fifteenth Century' in *Saints, Scholars and Politicians: Gender as a tool in Medieval Studies* eds Mthild van Dijk and Reneé Nip, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 25-52.

¹⁵⁰ van Dijk, 'Wolves Become Lambs', 61 & 61n6.

¹⁵¹ Spufford, 'Literacy, trade and religion in the commercial centres of Europe', 248.

¹⁵² Spufford, 'Literacy, trade and religion in the commercial centres of Europe', 248.

being introduced.¹⁵³ *Devotio moderna* was extremely active in furthering education and knowledge, and while the movement encouraged the growth of new schools, it was also deeply dependent on the growth of other independent schools to continue *devotio moderna*'s success. Yet what *devotio moderna* sought to provide was a specialized education aimed at devotional and spiritual development even if it grew out of the same roots as economic need. *Devotio moderna* was more concerned with *sapientia* rather than *scientia*.¹⁵⁴ This growing urban intellectual culture benefited women as well as men. As the urban elite grew, the desire to imitate noble customs gave women the chance to also receive an education. This female literacy is reflected within women's wills, where prayer books and other devotional works, usually translated into the vernacular, were documented.¹⁵⁵ For those in *devotio moderna*, being literate was not just about the skill of reading but also about gaining understanding of and developing the focus of their devotion. Devotional practices and prayer were one of the principal reasons why women were encouraged to learn to read and write in the late Middle Ages.¹⁵⁶

Sister Books: Literature for Imitation in *devotio moderna*

The Christian virtues of obedience and humility were valued and stressed within the *devotio moderna* teachings and appeared in *devotio moderna* literature.

¹⁵³ By 1382 Brussels had thirteen primary schools. Margaret Spufford argues that by this time there was already widespread lay literacy in Flemish. M. Spufford, 'Literacy, trade and religion in the commercial centres of Europe', 248-9.

¹⁵⁴ Oberman compares *devotio moderna*, and its interpretation as 'Christian humanism', to the similarly named Italian humanism movement of around the same time, see: Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 46-7.

¹⁵⁵ Thérèse de Hemptinne, 'Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550)' in *The Voices of Silence* eds Thérèse de Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora, Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, 119.

¹⁵⁶ de Hemptinne, 'Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices', 111.

Devotio moderna sister books, a common and encouraged form of *devotio moderna* literature, in particular, served several purposes within the community. A sister book was a large collection of biographies of those deceased sisters who had been considered successful in the living of their spiritual life style. A sister book was therefore edifying literature and a didactic tool, a ‘how to’ manual for successfully living a life of spiritual obedience. A sister book served as a vessel of information and devotion outside any formal preaching or sermons; preaching was important to an audience, but it was a momentary and immediate experience. Sister books were intended to be repeatedly read or listened to, and meditated upon. This was the devotional literature which acted as an important and repeated stimulus when the preaching had long ended.¹⁵⁷

Sister books also created an image of community. They ‘presented a picture of how “we” do things, how the religious life should be lived according to “us”’.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, sister books created a unique space where they were presenting information for and about women, and often by women. Whereas most experiences of women religious were described and mediated by celibate religious males, sister books were often compiled and edited by women, at least after the early years of the movement.¹⁵⁹ Sister books tend to have a lack of ecstatic and religious revelations amongst their contents. Older scholarship on *devotio moderna* ascribes this to a hesitant feeling towards anything supernatural, and

¹⁵⁷ Katherine Gill argues this point when discussing the production of vernacular religious literature, see: Katherine Gill, ‘Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300-1500’ in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds E. Ann Matter, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64-104.

¹⁵⁸ van Dijk, ‘Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen’, 246.

¹⁵⁹ Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women for Women About Women: The Sister-books of Fourteenth-Century Germany*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996) 32.; For a summary discussion of women religious, see: Clifford Hugh Lawrence, ‘Sisters or Handmaids’ in *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2001), 216-237.

certainly the Windesheim canons were suspicious of female visionaries.¹⁶⁰

Fearful of being associated with the beguines and labelled as heretics,

Windesheim went so far as to forbid their sisters from publishing revelations in

1455.¹⁶¹

Sister books created under the tutelage of Johannes Brinckerinck (d. 1419) exemplify the virtues this literature stressed. The Sister book of Diepenveen¹⁶² is, perhaps, one of the most well-known, and well-studied, pieces of literature produced by the *devotio moderna* movement, and within the world of *devotio moderna* it needs to be placed in the context of collections of *viten* [saints' lives] which were popular within the movement, particularly recording the lives of the brothers and sisters of *devotio moderna*.¹⁶³ It is a large collection of Middle Dutch *viten*, including the *vita* of Johannes Brinckerinck and sixty women who had lived the majority of their lives at the Dutch convent of Diepenveen.¹⁶⁴ This particular sister book is modelled on a 'tripartite structure' which begins with a discussion of the subject while they lived in the secular world, then progress to while they lived in the convent, and finally concludes at their deaths.¹⁶⁵ This manuscript was

¹⁶⁰ Despite their hesitance of female visionaries, *devotio moderna* sister books do contain miracle and visionary stories, although not in the form of revelations. While a minor difference, this is where the thin line was drawn between acceptable and unacceptable supernatural visions, see: van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 240-1.

¹⁶¹ Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), 66-71; van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 240-1, 244.

¹⁶² The Sister book of Diepenveen is anonymously authored, but uses the *viten* of the sisters as spiritual biographies depicting the ideals which they adhered.

¹⁶³ Two, independent, sixteenth-century versions of the Diepenveen sister book survived. The copyists were Greit Esschinges of St Agnes and Griet Koesters of St Mary; Deventer, City Archive and Athenaeum Library Ms 101 E 26; Zwolle, Rijksarchief, MS. Coll. van Rhemen, inv. no. 1, Sisters of the Common Life, Master Geert's House, Deventer, 1534.

¹⁶⁴ The convent of Diepenveen was founded in 1400 and instituted as priory of canonesses regular in 1408. The manuscript in question is preserved at Deventer, Stads- en Athenaeumbibliotheek, MS Suppl. 198 (101 E 26).

See Scheepsma, 'Writing, Editing, and Rearranging', 276; Mathilde van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies' in *Signs, wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church* eds Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 240; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 142.

¹⁶⁵ Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 142.

written and compiled just after the start of the Reformation on 14 September 1524 by Sister Griet Essinchghes, and is therefore, a late and well developed – perhaps best described as polished - example of this type of manuscript.¹⁶⁶ These volumes provided ‘invaluable sources for ideals and practices of piety.’¹⁶⁷ The sister books, amongst other *devotio moderna* literature, used particular *viten* of pious followers who, in their opinion reflected the most important virtues of the movement: obedience, humility and chastity in an attempt to provide didactic examples for further *devotio moderna* followers to mode. Amongst other things, the Sister book of Diepenveen makes specific note of sisters taking notes during non-liturgical preaching, and later copying these sermons.¹⁶⁸ As Mathilde van Dijk notes, compiling manuscripts such as the Diepenveen sister book fitted *devotio moderna*’s aim of imitating, firstly, Christ; then, secondly, the saints; and finally, ‘the exemplary sisters and brothers of their communities.’¹⁶⁹ This sister book provides a significant amount of ‘inside information’ concerning the recollection of the daily lives of those who lived at the Windesheim convent.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Scheepsma argues that the genre of sister books thrived particularly within the *devotio moderna* context because of the semi-monastic nature of the movement, see: Scheepsma, ‘Writing, Editing, and Rearranging’, 276; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 153.

¹⁶⁷ Usually the authors of these compilations were sisters or brothers who lived in these *devotio moderna* communities; van Dijk, ‘Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen’, 243.

¹⁶⁸ This point is significant when considering *when* the sermon was being written, and who was doing the writing. It was Paul-Gerhard Völker who, in 1963, first claimed it was preachers and not the listeners who recorded the sermons. This idea was further developed by Kurt Ruh in 1981. Thom Mertens adds a further layer by noting that the Sister book of Diepenveen shows the sisters taking notes of sermons and later copying them on paper. Paul-Gerhard Völker, ‘Die Überlieferungsformen mittelalterlicher deutscher Predigten’, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterum*, 92 (1963), 212-27; Kurt Ruh, ‘Deutsche Predigtbücher des Mittelalters’, in *Kleine Schriften*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984) 296-17; Thom Mertens, ‘Ghostwriting Sisters: The Preservation of Dutch Sermons of Father Confessors in the Fifteenth and the Early Sixteenth Century’ in *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 121-141.

¹⁶⁹ van Dijk, ‘Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen’, 243; Thomas à Kempis, *Sermones ad novicios regulares*, ed. Pohl, Sermon 3, p. 23-29.

¹⁷⁰ Scheepsma, ‘Writing, Editing, and Rearranging’, 277.

Devotio moderna sister books portray their community's female leaders as having characteristics to be admired and imitated. These 'leaders' were not always seen as official leaders, but rather they were women who exemplified the desirable virtues.¹⁷¹ These virtues included those which we will discuss in future chapters, such as humility and obedience. Amongst the many anecdotes within the Diepenveen sister book is a story regarding obedient behaviour. According to the sister book everyone obeyed Salome Sticken, including the animals – who generally were thought of as being irrational.¹⁷² The anecdote provides two stories about a certain cat: first the cat would become sick whenever it ate rats. Sticken then ordered the cat to continue to catch the rats but rather than eating them, the cat was told to bring them to Sticken, and from then on, the cat obediently brought the rats to Sticken. The second part concerned the cat meowing loudly while the prioress and sisters had gathered to confess their sins to each other. Sticken ordered the sisters to chase after the interrupting cat, but rather than running away, the cat laid itself down at the feet of Sticken, mimicking the posture the sisters took during confession. Sticken then ordered the cat to leave the room, and obediently and without hesitation, the cat followed orders.¹⁷³ The anecdote ends with Sticken's declaration of the cat's obedient behaviour: 'Look how this cat teaches you and provides a model of humble obedience!'¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, as van Dijk demonstrates, the point of Sticken's anecdote is not Sticken's leadership abilities, but rather how Sticken 'achieved true piety' through her control and

¹⁷¹ van Dijk specifies the virtues of charity and humility to be more important than obedience, see: van Dijk, 'Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen', 260.

¹⁷² van Dijk, 'Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen', 245.

¹⁷³ It is very curious here how the women are depicted confessing to each other. In the anecdote, this pastoral job is not commented on, rather the heretical notion of it is ignored and instead the obedience of the cat.

¹⁷⁴ Translation by Mathilde van Dijk, see: van Dijk, 'Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen', 245; Deventer, City Archive and Athenaeum Library Ms101 E 26 fols 200v-201r.

obedient discipline.¹⁷⁵ Van Dijk does not elaborate, however, on the possible importance Sticken's leadership had on the other characters in the anecdotes, as all characters were then inspired to act piously in a disciplined way, and were obedient as a response to Sticken's leadership; the importance of obedience in general is therefore emphasized. This approach is repeated in the other *viten* within the sister book. In addition to such biographies serving as models of instruction *devotio moderna* authors also sought inspiration from other religious works. These included the Church Fathers, specifically St Jerome who was the patron saint of *devotio moderna*.¹⁷⁶

The Women of *devotio moderna*

Devotio moderna was, as a movement, noted for its acceptance of, and attitude towards, women. The Low Countries were no stranger to the inclusion of lay-women in devotional movements. The Beguines, emerging at the end of the twelfth century in the Rhine bishopric of Liege, were religious women who did not require the taking of vows – similar to *devotio moderna*. The movement grew throughout Northwest Europe, particularly in urbanized areas – again, in a similar fashion to the *devotio moderna* movement. The Beguines, like the Cistercian nuns before them, took advantage of the religious fervour sweeping Western culture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁷⁷ Dyan Elliott has described the Beguine movement as an 'extension' of the Cistercian practice of affective piety epitomized by Bernard of Clairvaux. Caroline Walker Bynum first described the concept of affective piety as a new piety which no longer saw God as a harsh

¹⁷⁵ van Dijk, 'Female leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen', 244-6.

¹⁷⁶ Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 46.

¹⁷⁷ For a summary of the Beguine movement, see: Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 231-235.

judge, but rather stressed his humanity,¹⁷⁸ and Elliott defines ‘affective piety’ as a ‘form of religious devotion involving intense meditation on the physical and emotional sufferings of Christ and other holy figures.’¹⁷⁹

The Beguines’ piety and success would later influence *devotio moderna*. The Beguine movement in the Low Countries allowed real autonomy to women, unfortunately their blemished history was marked by the suspicion of mystical heresy – a primary concern for Grote who feared his movement being associated with heresy.¹⁸⁰ However, it was these religious women who paved the way for the Low Countries’ acceptance of female agency in the form of the female religious.¹⁸¹ The Beguine women, and their male counter-parts the Beghards, ‘adopted a pious and chaste way of life, and distinguished themselves from other lay persons by the simplicity of their clothing’.¹⁸² The Beguines and the women of *devotio moderna* shared several characteristics including their lack of vows and their numbers with women outnumbering their male counterparts; and their active involvement in lay society. The lack of any requirement for a formal vow has set

¹⁷⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 82-109.

¹⁷⁹ Dyan Elliott, ‘Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body’ in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100-1500*, eds Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 24.

¹⁸⁰ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, ‘When Women Preached: An Introduction to Female Homiletic, Sacramental, and Liturgical Roles in the Later Middle Ages’ in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 31-55.; And Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, ‘*Eciam Lollardi*: Some Further Thoughts on Fiona Somerset’s ‘*Eciam Mulier*: Women in Lollardy and the Problem of Sources’ in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 261-78.

¹⁸¹ *Devotio moderna* presented opportunities for some females within the movement to assume semi-pastoral roles. For example: giving *collationes* and even hearing confession, although this seems to be on a small internal level within groups of women. See: Kerby-Fulton, ‘*Eciam Lollardi*’, 266. Also, see Van Engen’s chapter: Van Engen, ‘Devout Communities and Inquisitorial Order: The Legal Defense of the New Devout’ in *Kirchenrenform von unten: Gerhard Zerbolt von Zutphen und die Bruder vom gemeinsamen Leben* ed. Nikolaus Staubach, (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2004), 44-101.

¹⁸² While the beghards were the male counterparts to the beguines, they were also severely outnumbered by the beguines. Florence Koorn, ‘Women Without Vows: The case of beguines and the Sisters of the Common Life in the Northern Netherlands’ in *Women and Men in Spiritual Culture XIV-XVII centuries: a meeting of North and South* edited by Elisja Schulte van Kessel, (The Hague: Netherlands Government Publishing Office, 1986), 135.

movements such as the Beguines or *devotio moderna* apart from other devotional movements, particularly for women. Both movements allowed women to pursue a religious vocation without needing to irrevocably vow themselves to the monastery. They gained a community-style society with similar individuals without being forced to resign their secular lives.¹⁸³

Both Beguines and the women of *devotio moderna* held the ‘chastity ideal’.¹⁸⁴ Vows of chastity for Beguine women tended to be more common in their earlier centuries. By the fourteenth century it was considered extremely exceptional for a Beguine to have made a vow and by the sixteenth century, despite detailed surviving descriptions of Beguines in Amsterdam and Haarlem, there are no traces of vows.¹⁸⁵ It seems that a formal vow was only performed on unusual occasions, and even in these cases, the women were referred to as ‘Beguine’ prior to the vow being taken.¹⁸⁶ Around the same time that Beguine vows became less frequent, at the end of the fourteenth century, the Sisters of the Common Life arose in connection with *devotio moderna*. *Devotio moderna* and the Beguines existed simultaneously during the fifteenth century, although the new movement does not seem to have held much attraction for adherents of the old. According to existing records from the period of 1439-1454 only three Beguines left to become nuns at the *devotio moderna* influenced Augustinian houses of Ghent.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Scheepsma describes these women who sought religious community yet wished to retain secular status as women with ‘high religious aspirations’. Wybren Scheepsma, ‘Hendrik van Leuven: Dominican, Visionary, and Spiritual Leader of Beguines’ in *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500* eds Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 271.

¹⁸⁴ The idea of the ‘chastity ideal’ amongst both the beguines and the women of *devotio moderna* is discussed in: Koorn, ‘Women Without vows’, 135-148.

¹⁸⁵ Koorn, ‘Women Without Vows’, 136.

¹⁸⁶ There is evidence of this occurring for women in Cologne, however women who did not call themselves beguines took this same vow, see: F.M. Stein, *The Religious Women of Cologne*, (PhD Dissertation Yale University, 1977), 57, 71-75.

¹⁸⁷ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 111.

Women were a central part of the *devotio moderna* movement and thus their behaviour and piety was of great concern and was actively addressed by its leaders. We gain through one of these, Brinckerinck, a sense of the women who were directly involved with the movement. Sister Liesbeth of Delft (d. 1423) took notes on Brinckerinck's Dutch sermons given at Diepenveen.¹⁸⁸ These sermons discuss the 'heart of a young woman' and how it is 'like an unwritten wax tablet'. They further describe how a young woman should make her heart like a 'great book', beginning with a 'godly desire for spiritual progress,' in order to later find 'peace' in her old age.¹⁸⁹ He encouraged women to keep books of virtues in their youth so they could reflect upon these virtues later in life. Brinckerinck did not always portray his concern for women so overtly. Some of his most famous sermons on conversions were formally directed at a general audience, but it is clear that his real concern was the conversion of women: 'We should restrain ourselves from all the sensuality of our evil inclinations as well as from all the confidence and flattery of men, for our dear Lord led his bride into the wilderness, there to speak to her heart to heart... A good Christian woman will 'pay little attention to honour, flattery, gossip, or contempt, but have only her dear Lord before her eyes and think only of his things.'¹⁹⁰

Brinckerinck preached obedience and reasoned that a truly spiritual person, either man or woman, should act without a 'why' (*sonder enich waeromme*), and instead should 'keep an eye on our purpose [our 'why' (*waerom*)], and so we may come to see our reward.'¹⁹¹ In this particular sermon, Brinckerinck used the

¹⁸⁸ Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 77.

¹⁸⁹ Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 77.

¹⁹⁰ Van Engen, 'John Brinckerinck on Conversion' in *Devotio Moderna*, 224.

¹⁹¹ Both the English translation and Dutch transcription are taken from: Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 77. Van Engen also reproduces this particular sermon in English translation, see: Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 223-230.

example of Mary Magdalene seeking the Lord and finding him tending the garden.¹⁹² The imagery of the Lord tending to his garden of ‘virtues’ is combined with the reputation of Mary Magdalene, a reformed prostitute. It is Mary Magdalene’s chosen, and direct, actions in seeking the Lord that Brinckerinck chooses to emphasize: ‘If we do not try to find our dear Lord here by way of the virtues...then we shall also not find him in heaven... We should now be gathering *humility, obedience*, and all the other virtues, on which to live when we are no longer in a position to be gathering.’¹⁹³ Mary Magdalene’s former sinful actions as a prostitute are set aside because of her genuine remorse, and her active seeking of the Lord.

Brinckerinck used the names of saints such as St Bernard, St Augustine, St Frances, and St Agnes, to inspire his listeners to maintain the virtue of obedience, because for him the Christian virtues of obedience and humility were the most important ones.¹⁹⁴ His encouragement of women to reject flattery and gossip and instead only look towards Christ show Brinckerinck’s concern for the female soul.¹⁹⁵ His sermons depict harsh and direct ideas about the conduct of Christian living. When it comes to fasting Brinckerinck draws directly from St Augustine by saying ‘we should approach eating as medicine’ meaning eating was necessary for strengthening the body, but one should not do so more than necessary.¹⁹⁶ For the Brothers, their position within the movement stimulated the spirituality of

¹⁹² Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 223.

¹⁹³ Translation is taken from Van Engen; the emphasis is my own. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 223.

¹⁹⁴ Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 224.

¹⁹⁵ Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 224; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 225-6.

Grote. This stimulation permeated Grote's sermons addressed to their congregation.

The Sisters of the Common Life, sometimes seen as the counterpart to the Brothers of the Common Life, in reality had a much more practical role within the *devotio moderna* movement, particularly as when it came to their relationship with their original leader, Master Geert Grote. While the Brothers were the active preachers of the movement, it was the Sisters 'who absorbed this spirit and applied it in their work and in their religious life.'¹⁹⁷ *Devotio moderna*, it has been argued, was 'an attractive and empowering [life] for women' and certainly there were several sister houses for every brother house.¹⁹⁸ The women of *devotio moderna* become the model examples for others following them, before and after their deaths, and through them the movement attracted further members. In a sense, these 'passive' members of the movement were a form of advertisement who were responsible for gaining more members into their movement.¹⁹⁹

One of the attractions of the movement for women may have been its emphasis on literacy as explored above. For women, reading and writing was a way to 'overcome their spatial confinement and mental isolation', and more importantly within the context of the movement, it was a way of practicing meditation, prayer and devotion.²⁰⁰ Autonomous sister houses helped develop new active ministerial roles for women, which included, on occasions, preaching and confession.²⁰¹ Largely because of this, *devotio moderna* drew accusations similar

¹⁹⁷ Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 259.

¹⁹⁸ For this observation see: Kerby-Fulton, 'Eciam Lollardi', 264.

¹⁹⁹ Post makes the comparison between the 'active' Brothers and 'passive' Sisters. See: Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 259.

²⁰⁰ de Hemptinne, 'Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550)', 126.

²⁰¹ Kerby-Fulton, 'When Women Preached', 36.

to those made against the Beguines. Late medieval concerns over women, particularly female visionaries, emphasised the woman's inability to discern between the spirits, or the *discernment of spirits*, and that women were unable to tell the difference between what was a heavenly revelation or a diabolical delusion.²⁰² In fact, in 1455 such anxiety was felt by Johannes Busch and his Windesheim chapter over whether or not visions were heavenly revelations or diabolical delusions that lead Windesheim to forbid women publishing revelations.²⁰³

Despite the obvious acceptance of women within their movement, these suspicions about female visionaries still persisted within the *devotio moderna* movement.²⁰⁴ Mathilde van Dijk discusses these points and notes suspicion over women and 'supernatural' occurrences – either visions or revelations – yet this did not seem to cause a decrease in mentioning female visionaries in the writings of female *devotio moderna* biographies.²⁰⁵ Van Dijk points to two scholars who have uncovered several miracle and visionary stories.²⁰⁶ His research on Lisbeth Heenvliet (d. 1452), sister of Diepenveen, considers particular examples of her

²⁰² For a discussion on the *discernment of spirits*, see: Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 66-71.

²⁰³ Mathilde Van Dijk, 'Henry Mande: The Making of a Male Visionary in Devotio Moderna' in *Saints, Scholars, and Politicians: Gender as a tool in Medieval Studies*, eds Mathilde van Dijk and Renee Nip, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 138; *Acta Capituli Windeshemensis: Acta van de kapittelvergaderingen der Congregatie van Windesheim*, ed. S. van der Woude (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1953), 53.

²⁰⁴ For a specific and succinct discussion on the problematic risk of female visionaries, see Voaden's discussion on the discernment of spirits. Rosalyn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), 66-71.

²⁰⁵ van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 241.

²⁰⁶ van Dijk points to the work of both Thom Mertens and Wybren Scheepsma, see: van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 241n7; Thom Mertens, 'Het Diepenveense zusterboek als exponent van gemeenschapstichtende kloosterliteratuur', in Wybren Scheepsma, ed., *Het ootmoedig fundament van Diepenveen, Zeshonderd jaar Maria en Angesklooster 1400-2000* (Deventer, 2002), 77-94; Wybren Scheepsma, 'Illustere voorbeelden. De invloed van de *Legenda Aurea* op de geschriften van de koorvrouwen van Windesheim', in *Een Boec dat men te Latine heet Aurea Legenda: Betrage zur niederlandischen Uebersetzung der Legenda Aurea* (Munich, 2002) 262-82.

miraculous recovery from blindness.²⁰⁷ Lisbeth's mother prayed to God and the Virgin Mother and subsequently Lisbeth's eyesight was healed. Her physical blindness is only described as being a psychological concern for Lisbeth, who was still a small child, and for her mother, who was responsible for praying to God for Lisbeth's health. Lisbeth's mother, 'did not dare to inform the Child's father' of her blindness leaving the father free of concern.²⁰⁸ Because of this, the medical issue of Lisbeth's blindness is only ever a problem for the women in the story, as is the subsequent miracle of recovery. The gendered divide in the story places the women on a side of the miraculous whereas the man, her father, is left without any associations with the supernatural.

As an organized religious movement, *devotio moderna* gave women a chance to be both part of a religious community whilst remaining within lay-society. The enthusiasm it provided for women is clear in the numbers: women devout outnumbered men three to one.²⁰⁹ Some historians disagree on how extensively women were involved with *devotio moderna*, as they did not publically preach nor did they perform pastoral activities.²¹⁰ Predominantly, their abstention from any male-specific roles would have been an effort to avoid any heretical claims, something the Beguines before them were not lucky enough to avoid. Nevertheless, women made up a large, and important, part of *devotio*

²⁰⁷ van Dijk's research is cited from the manuscript at Deventer, Stads- en Atheneumbibliotheek, MS 101 E 26.

²⁰⁸ van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies', 239.

²⁰⁹ R.R. Post, *Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vòòr de Reformatie van ± 1500 tot ± 1580*, (Utrecht, 1954), 160-7; Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 265-72; G. Rehm, *Die Schwestern vom gemeinsamen Leben in Nordwestlichen Deutschland. Untersuchungen vzur Geschichte der Devotio Moderna und des weiblichen Religiosentums*, (Berlin: BHS 11, 1985) 16; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 4;

²¹⁰ Post in particular believed women were more passive than active participants in the success of *devotio moderna*. Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 259, 259, 497. As Scheepsma notes, Post is the only scholar give a reason for why he focuses so little on women in his work: Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 4 n14.

moderna and even more significantly, *devotio moderna* was an important movement amongst the total of religious women of the later middle ages. Of the nearly ten thousand counted religious women at the beginning of the sixteenth century, approximately eight thousand belonged to *devotio moderna*.²¹¹ Furthermore, these women seriously influenced the movement itself, with such a large number of female members that it was necessary for the leaders to accommodate their needs. This is why a majority of *devotio moderna* literature was produced in the vernacular to accommodate women who were not schooled in Latin, particularly later in the movement's history.²¹² Additionally, the large number of women in *devotio moderna* influenced the subjects chosen in *devotio moderna* literature. By considering the large proportion of women, interested in religious devotion, who chose to be part of the movement in conjunction with the influence these women had on the literature produced by *devotio moderna* this thesis will continue to explore a particular *devotio moderna* manuscript and analyse the compilers' concerns given their large female audience.

Conclusion

Devotio moderna invented a new vision of what a religious and truly pious life, modelled after Christ's humanity, should entail. The movement began with Grote at the end of the fourteenth century and continued to the mid-sixteenth

²¹¹ These included Sisters of the Common Life, tertiary groups, and canonesses regular. Post, *Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vòòr de Reformatie van ± 1500 tot ± 1580*, 160-7; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 15.

²¹² Herbert Grundman, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und die religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. Und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik*, (Anhang: Neu Beiträge zur Geschichte der religiösen Bewegungen im Mittelalter, 4th ed., Darmstadt, 1977) 457.; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 19.

century when it died at around the time of the Protestant Reformation.²¹³ Although geographically it remained only influential within the Low Countries, *devotio moderna* has been described as ‘probably in its day the most influential religious movement in Northern Europe.’²¹⁴ With humble beginnings in Deventer and Zwolle, *devotio moderna* quickly spread to the entirety of the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and even parts of Poland and France.²¹⁵ The movement gained popularity during this period because of its ability to bridge the gap between lay and religious society. Without mandatory vows and focusing, instead, on spiritual practices, it gave lay and religious people alike a venue to express their devotion despite their mistrust of the church. With the lack of vows, *devotio moderna* was able to remain a, relatively, lay movement. This allowed a fluidity of interaction between lay society and those with more traditional religious practices. The lack of vows also allowed those interested in religious community lifestyle to ‘commit’ to a religious life style, whilst also remaining able to leave at any point in time. What often happened, particularly with young women, is that they would take an unofficial commitment to chastity as part of their *devotio moderna* community, but later would marry. The lack of enforceable vows seems to have made *devotio moderna* more popular.

The Low Countries had a long history of female involvement with religious movements. The Beguine movement was amongst the first of these. It grew in strength in the diocese of Liège during the thirteenth century and formed small religious communities. These women were able to create a quasi-monastic

²¹³ Van Engen notes: ‘disbanded by Catholic and Protestant rulers alike’, see: Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 5.

²¹⁴ Bernard M.G. Reardon, *Religious Thoughts in the Reformation*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2013), 14.

²¹⁵ De Jong, ‘Het karakter en de invloed van de Moderne Devotie’ in *Historisch Tijdschrift*, IV (1925), 26-58; Hyma, ‘Erasmus and the Reformation in Germany’, 99.

community without taking any official monastic vows. Places like Brabant saw a growth of ‘extraordinary religious culture among women... [which] took on the form of the Beguine communities.’²¹⁶ As they belonged neither to the laity nor to the vowed religious, the Church viewed the Beguines as a problem – a fact which concerned Geert Grote during *devotio moderna*’s beginnings. Both movements’ lack of vows provided a connection between vowed religious and the laity – an involvement which allowed the devotional movements to gain certain amounts of societal success. *Devotio moderna* and the Beguines were not identical movements, but they share several characteristics and there is little doubt that the Low Countries’ history with Beguines influenced the success and interest in *devotio moderna*.

Unlike the Beguine movement, *devotio moderna* has been neglected by modern scholarship – with mainly Dutch scholars choosing to research the movement. This unfortunate fact leaves us with relatively little information on how *devotio moderna* affected late medieval society: this is still open to conjecture. The movement’s true role in causing the Reformation remains uncertain. This chapter has shown that although the movement remaining localised to the Low Countries, it was a broad societal one, involving the laity as well as vowed-religious in its growth and success. The influence which *devotio moderna* received from the changing society and the influence it had *upon* society makes it worthy of further study. For women, it provided an opportunity for individual and group piety, emphasizing the importance of chastity and the virtues of humility and obedience. It encouraged its female members to seek exemplars of

²¹⁶ Geert Warnar, ‘*Ex levitate mulierum*: Masculine Mysticism and Jan van Ruusbroec’s Perception of Religious Women’ in *The Voices of Silence: Women’s Literacy in a Men’s Church* eds Thérèse de Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 194.

pious women who epitomized these virtues within its books of *viten*. These *viten* provided stories of women who were chaste and humble but were not members of established religious orders, including women who received religious revelations although there was always ambivalence towards these amongst the male leaders of the order.

Amongst those who received revelations in the fourteenth century and who were known in the fifteenth century was St Bridget of Sweden, whose life and example are a focus of the manuscript described in this thesis. There is very little to connect St Bridget of Sweden directly to the *devotio moderna* movement. Mostly when St Bridget is mentioned in *devotio moderna* scholarship, it is while discussing women's involvement in devotional movements. Van Engen mentions both Bridget and Catherine of Sienna when talking about the presence of women in religious movements.²¹⁷ At times Van Engen also uses Bridget to showcase the tensions between being canonized and being labelled heretical.²¹⁸ In Scheepsma's research on the Canonesses of Windesheim, he makes a brief note that one canoness, Jacomijne Costers, recited the fifteen prayers of the wounds of the cross every day for a year. During the fifteenth century, these prayers were attributed to St Bridget although they had been known for some time before.²¹⁹ Van Dijk compares the followers of both *devotio moderna* and Bridget saying there was some significant differences between the two groups of followers, but they did share some common tendencies, in particular both groups put emphasis on turning away from worldly pleasures and instead focused on obedient discipline. Van Dijk also makes the observation that while there were certainly some *devotio moderna*

²¹⁷ Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 4, 55.

²¹⁸ Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, 85, 119.

²¹⁹ Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 184 & 184n40.

monasteries which were influenced by Bridget, the later conversion of many of these to Protestantism means that their literature was often lost.²²⁰ By the end of the fourteenth century Bridget's *revelations* were well circulated throughout Europe. Her post-mortem popularity simultaneously grew with Grote's establishment of *devotio moderna* and this popularity would persist throughout the period of *devotio moderna*'s success. Mathilde van Dijk notes, however, briefly, that the two groups of followers, the women of *devotio moderna* and the Birgittines, were definitely different, but both groups shared some significant similarities; in particular, the groups' emphasis on turning away from worldly possessions and desires and instead turning towards devotional discipline.²²¹ Van Dijk also makes the important observation that the lack of existing sources connecting the two movements could be because many *devotio moderna* quasi-monastic communities which were influenced by Bridget later turned to Protestantism, and would have discarded any Birgittine materials remaining.²²² *Devotio moderna* shared some views with the Birgittines. Both groups placed men above women within the social hierarchy, as was normal within their societies, however the opportunities afforded to women in both movements were also relatively more generous in comparison to other focused situations.²²³ Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114, the primary focus for this thesis, highlights some of these similarities which were shared by both *devotio moderna* and Bridget. Both groups' inclusion of women, and focus on disciplined devotion make it clear why *devotio moderna* would draw inspiration from the life and texts of Bridget.

²²⁰ Mathilde van Dijk, *Een Rij Van Spiegels: De heilige Barbara van Nicomedia als voorbeeld voor vrouwelijk religieuzen*, (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren Hilversum, 2000), 75, 90-92.

²²¹ Mathilde van Dijk, *Een Rij Van Spiegels: De heilige Barbara van Nicomedia als voorbeeld voor vrouwelijk religieuzen*, (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren Hilversum, 2000), 75, 90-92.

²²² van Dijk, *Een Rij van Spiegels*, 91.

²²³ Kerby-Fulton, 'Eciam Lollardi', 264.

This connection is the central focus of this thesis. This thesis argues that MS 114, a Low Countries production, was a manuscript produced under the *devotio moderna* movement in its earliest years. It highlights several of the important themes and concerns discussed in this chapter, and provides, in its collection of material around Bridget, a possible early form of ‘sister book’. The following chapters will use the history of *devotio moderna*, which has been discussed in this chapter, as the context for why and how MS 114 was produced. Chapter two will look more closely at MS 114 as a manuscript, analysing its physical characteristic and specific contents and presenting it as a creation of the *devotio moderna* movement. The final two chapters will then use the information presented in chapters one and chapters two to discuss the two central themes presented in MS 114, chastity and obedience, and how they relate to other, more prominent, *devotio moderna* literature.

Those who were part of the *devotio moderna* movement had trouble ‘fitting in’ in their time, but equally historians have had trouble fitting them in to the story of the past, as they overlap genres of study. In part, this thesis hopes to expand the knowledge of this important religious movement and show the influence *devotio moderna* had beyond the Low Countries. By analysing MS 114 and its inclusion of St Bridget of Sweden, who has not previously been clearly associated with *devotio moderna* geographically or religiously, this thesis will demonstrate Bridget’s devotional influence at a time approaching a Reformation of the Catholic faith. Bridget remained a Catholic saint, and both Bridget’s and *devotio moderna*’s advocated practices were used during and after the Protestant Reformation. Manuscript 114 will draw together the two movements more clearly

and demonstrate how Bridget could provide the Low Countries with a new religious movement and a female exemplar for their sister houses.

Chapter Two

Lincoln Cathedral Library Manuscript 114

Prologi Revelationum Sancti Birgittae etc

Introduction

The Dutch devotional movement, *devotio moderna*, encouraged a pious lifestyle inspired by the example of Christ's humanity, the practices of the saints and the lives of ordinary members of the movement. Without mandatory vows, *devotio moderna* brought lay and religious individuals together as one movement to practice this devotion. The previous chapter discussed *devotio moderna*, its history and its inclusion of women, as well as its early involvement in the progression of literacy and production of both secular and religious literature. Building upon the context laid out in that chapter, this chapter will discuss one particular manuscript, Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114 (henceforth referred to as MS 114) in detail. By analysing the people and themes occurring in the manuscript, along with the physical characteristics and known history of MS 114, this chapter will demonstrate that MS 114 was an early *devotio moderna* piece. Furthermore, by displaying similar themes in its chosen literature to later *devotio moderna* sister books, it was, in part intended for a similar purpose.

MS 114 is made up of nineteen articles. It is not a late, accidental or opportunistic gathering of extracts and pieces previously copied for different manuscripts. Rather it is a unified manuscript, with all 19 articles specifically chosen to be part of it. In analysing the manuscript contents, it becomes clear that particular themes were considered important by those who were responsible for its compilation. In particular, the theme of obedience is present throughout the

various sections of the manuscript, represented in various forms. These varying types of obedience also prove to be significant themes in other well-known *devotio moderna* literature and were central to their thought and teachings. Discovery of MS 114's date and place of compilation further strengthens its connection to the *devotio moderna* movement.

The previous chapter has already focused on *devotio moderna*'s inclusion of women and their focus on behaviour as a means of spiritual obedience. Currently, the most well-known *devotio moderna* literature about women is their sister books. These books utilised the *viten* (lives) of the movement's sisters to exhibit important behavioural characteristics and teach future readers and members a way of living in pious obedience through imitation of others. *Devotio moderna*'s concern for its contemporary society led it to focus primarily on these *viten* of their sisters rather than on the established lives of older saints. Earlier in their movement, however, at the beginning of the fifteenth century when MS 114 was compiled, the *devotio moderna* movement had not had sufficient time, nor enough deceased sisters to use as subjects for their literature. This current chapter will argue that *devotio moderna*, lacking their own material, relied upon a recently deceased spiritually famous woman, Bridget of Sweden, to embody their ideals and beliefs about how to live an obedient, spiritual, and secular life. In this way, *devotio moderna* established its instructions to both lay and religious members on living humbly in imitation of Christ's humanity and encouraging a chaste lifestyle to emphasise obedience.

MS 114 cannot be considered a *devotio moderna* sister book, as it lacks the main component, in that it does not contain a life of any of the *devotio moderna* sisters. However, some of the choices made in creating MS 114

emphasises the themes and practices later commonly found in what is known as the *devotio moderna* sister book. As a manuscript, MS 114 is neatly divided into two, nearly equal, parts. The first part employs Bridget as its model character, setting her out as a pattern of obedience, as will be discussed in a later chapter. The practice of humble obedience is then also encouraged in the second part of the manuscript, using a variety of extracts from sources unrelated to Bridget herself. The manuscript uses Bridget, then, not because of her importance as an individual, but rather because of the ideals she embodied and the behaviours she practiced. Furthermore, Bridget, like many *devotio moderna* women, was a religious-lay woman, a characteristic which differentiated *devotio moderna* from cloistered and vowed movements.

This thesis is the first examination of MS 114 within the context of *devotio moderna* and looking at MS 114's Bridget in a different way. Previously scholars have focused upon only the articles concerning Bridget and have assumed that the manuscript was Birgittine and English in heritage. This narrow focus led scholars to decide that the manuscript was compiled to support Bridget's successful canonization or to encourage the rise of Birgittine devotion in England at the time.²²⁴ By ignoring the parts of the manuscript unrelated to Bridget, scholars have missed the context in which the manuscript was produced. This thesis places the Birgittine texts within the context of the manuscript as a whole, rather than assuming Birgittine origins. In doing so, it also demonstrates what MS 114 can tell scholars about fifteenth century behavioural ideals within devotional piety,

²²⁴ One scholar, Claire L. Sahlin assumed the origins of MS 114 to be English as the manuscript currently resides in Lincoln, UK. Sahlin's misinterpretation will be discussed later in this chapter. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 194.

particularly within the context of the *devotio moderna* movement—and with close study will reveal the two to be connected.

Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114

Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114 is a substantial volume in terms of its physical size, and its physical properties provide considerable insight into the origins of the manuscript. It is, therefore, imperative to study MS 114 first as a physical object, and then, secondly, to consider the contents of the individual articles. The manuscript contains 116 parchment leaves, given the modern numbering i, 1-115.²²⁵ Each parchment leaf, or folio, is divided in two columns written in ink.²²⁶ Overall, it measures 290 x 205 mm with text-based folios measuring margins of 150 mm top margin, 300 mm unbound side margin, 50 mm middle margin, and bottom margins measuring 400 mm.²²⁷ The manuscript remains bound in its original fifteenth-century binding, consisting of sheepskin over thick wooden boards, with two straps with metal attached clasps.²²⁸ There are two modern paper leaves at each end of the manuscript, and a modern Lincoln Cathedral bookplate inside the front cover. A further modern addition is the label of 'MS 114' in black on the spine. A chain-staple mark in the upper edge of the back cover indicates this manuscript was once meant to be used as part of a library. The manuscript contains nineteen different articles of varying lengths written by various authors. For reference throughout this chapter, see Table A for a list of the articles as well as their titles, folio numbers, authors, dates, and any title abbreviations used.

²²⁵ Before Thomson's 1989 catalogue for Lincoln Cathedral Library scholarship sometimes used the folio count from Woolley's 1927 catalogue. Woolley's catalogue counts the first, title page, folio as fo. 1, whereas Thomson counts this as fo. i. This means that early and later scholarship has a discrepancy of one folio when citing the manuscript. Unless otherwise noted, the folio count I will use will align with Thomson's. When scholarship is cited using Woolley's older method I will include Thomson's folio number. R.M. Woolley. *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library*, (Oxford, 1927); Rodney M. Thomson, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library*, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1989), 87-9.

²²⁶ Fos i-4v contain distinctive ruling of the columns. After fo. 4 the distinctive ruled marks are less prominent.

²²⁷ Fo. 1 has a bottom margin of 300 cm. This does not continue past fo. 1.

²²⁸ According to the Thomson's *Catalogue*, these straps were renewed in pigskin.

Table A: Contents of Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114

Article Number	Article Title	Folios	Date ²²⁹	Original Author	Abbreviation
Article 1	<i>Selected Offices, and Prayers for the BVM</i> ²³⁰	Fos 1-4v	Unknown ²³¹	Unknown	
Article 2	<i>Prologus Magistri Mathie in Librum Celestium Revelationum Beatae Birgittae</i> ²³²	Fos 5v-7v	1340s	Master Mathias of Linköping, Sweden. Swedish Confessor to St Bridget	<i>Prologue</i>
Article 3	<i>Epistola Solitarii ad Reges</i> ²³³	Fos 7v-17	1370-73	Alfonso of Jaén (Also known as Alfonso Pecha),	

²²⁹ Dates given in this table are the original dates these pieces were written, not the date they were added to MS 114.

²³⁰ Woolley's catalogue cites this as *Offices of St Birgitta*.

²³¹ It is possible this was placed within MS 114 to represent the 'little office of the Blessed Virgin Mary', a popular book of hours dating from the tenth century and which became universally popular by the fourteenth century. It is believed that Bridget convinced her husband, Ulf, to read from these hours, see: Marguerite Tjader-Harris, Albert Kezel Ryle, and Petrus Olai. *St Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 240n30; Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 200) 1, 78-9n4.

²³² This *Prologue* is sometimes titled *stupor et mirabilia*.

²³³ MS 114 only chapters 1-7 of Alfonso's *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges*.

				former Bishop of Jaén and last Confessor to Bridget	
Article 4	<i>Epistola Defensoria venerabilis viri fratris Magni Petri generalis confessoris monasterii Watzensteen</i>	Fos 17- 18v	1384-91 ²³⁴	Magni Petri, Confessor General of Vadstena, another personal confessor to Bridget	
Article 5	<i>Epistola cuiusdam religiosi ordinis fratrum minorum</i>	Fos 18v-24v	1391- 1417 ²³⁵	Anonymous Franciscan friar/cleric	
Article 6	<i>Defensorium Beatae Birgittae</i>	Fos 24v-49v	1380s	Adam Easton,	

²³⁴ Undhagen notes it was probably written between 1384, when Magni Petri took the position of confessor general, and 1391 when Bridget was canonization. Carl Gustaf Undhagen, 'Une source du prologue (Chap.1) aux Revelations de Sainte Birgite par le cardinal Jean de Turrecremata' *Eranos* 58 (1960), 218.

²³⁵ This date range is given in: Roger Ellis, 'Text and Controversy: In Defense of St Birgitta of Sweden' in *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale*, eds Helen Barr and Ann M. Hutchison, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 303-321. Claire Sahlin gives a date range of 1391-1409, I have quoted Ellis's date as it is inclusive of Sahlin's.

				English Cardinal	
Article 7	<i>Peticio admissionie articulorum</i>	Fos 49v-50	1380s	Adam Easton	
Article 8	<i>Epistola domini cardinalis Anglie ad Abbatissam et conventum</i>	Fo. 50rv	9 February 1390 ²³⁶	Adam Easton	
Article 9	<i>Sermo sanctissimi in Christo patris domini Bonifacii pape noni pro canonizazione beate Birgitte habitus atque factus</i>	Fos 50v-54v	7 October 1391 ²³⁷	Pope Boniface IX	Pope Boniface IX's Canonization Sermon

²³⁶ This article is given a partial date within MS 114, however it is likely this date was copied from another exemplar.

²³⁷ This represents the date that the sermon was originally given.

Article 10	<i>Vita Beatae Birgittae</i>	Fos 54v-61v	17 December 1373 ²³⁸	Prior Peter of Alvastra and Master Peter of Skänninge ²³⁹	<i>Vita</i>
Article 11	<i>Offices for Bridget, Visitation, Crown of Thorns</i> ²⁴⁰	Fos 62- 66	1376	Birger Gregersson, Archbishop of Uppsala	<i>Offices</i>
Article 12	<i>De honestate vitae</i>	Fos 66- 67v	Possibly 13 th century	(Pseudo-) Bernard	
Article 13 ²⁴¹	<i>De Sancto Ieronimo</i>	Fos 68- 79v	12 th /13 th century	(Pseudo-) Eusebius of Cremona ²⁴²	
Article 14	<i>Incipiunt insueta</i>	Fos 79v-87	12 th /13 th century	(Pseudo-)	

²³⁸ This represents the date that the *vita* for Bridget's canonization, upon which this copy is based, is documented as having been completed.

²³⁹ Both Peters were in Sweden until 1349, and then resided in Italy until Bridget's death in 1373. Both also acted as Bridget's confessor and secretary. In further confusing fashion, both Peters had a father named Olaf, giving them both the surname 'Olafsoon' or 'Olavi'; because of this, they are usually distinguished as 'prior' and 'master'. Prior Peter and Master Peter are generally credited with writing Bridget's *vita*, but it was submitted as part of the canonization material which was edited, polished, and expanded by Alfonso Jaén, see: Tjader-Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 236n1.

²⁴⁰ Also described in the manuscript as *historia de sancta Birgitta*. This includes all antiphons and responses, two prayers, a capitulum, and a hymn, which is a selection of the larger Birger Gregersson's office in honour of St Bridget. See: Carl Gustf Undhagen, ed., *Sancta Birgitta Revelationes Book I* (Stockholm, 1977), 127n12.

²⁴¹ What appears in MS 114 as Articles 13 and 14 often appeared as a trio of *epistolae*, the third, *Epistola de magnificentiis Hieronymi ad Cyrillum* by (Pseudo-) Augustine, is not included within MS 114. These three letters detailed the last hours of St Jerome's life.

²⁴² This is a letter attributed to St Eusebius to Damascus, Bishop of Rome, and Theodore, a Roman senator announcing the death of St Jerome.

	<i>miracula et prodigiosa venerabilis Cirilli archiepiscopi Ierosolomitani (etc)</i> ²⁴³			Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem	
Article 15	<i>Homilia de Maria Magdalena</i> ²⁴⁴	Fos 87v-89v	13 th century ²⁴⁵	(Pseudo-) Origen ²⁴⁶	
Article 16	<i>De Confessione</i> ²⁴⁷	Fos 89v-96v	14 th century	Matthew of Cracow (ascribed to Thomas Aquinas)	
Article 17	<i>In floribus sancti Bernhardi liber V. de contemplacione</i>	Fos 97- 103	Unknown	St Bernard of Clairvaux	

²⁴³ This is a letter from St Cyril to St Augustine of Hippo regarding St Jerome.

²⁴⁴ Listed on fo. i as 'Omelia stabat Maria'. Early versions of this text often are accompanied with works by or ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux, and this manuscript is no different, see Article 17. John P. McCall, 'Chaucer and the Pseudo Origen De Maria Magdalena: A Preliminary Study' *Speculum* 46 (1971), 494.

²⁴⁵ This text was likely written for the feast day of Mary Magdalen, 22 July.

²⁴⁶ The original author remains unknown; McCall argues the text originally came from France. McCall, 'Chaucer and the Pseudo Origen De Maria Magdalena', 495.

²⁴⁷ Also known as *de modo confitendi*.

Article 18	<i>Incipit tractatus super capitulo omnis utriusque sexus de pe et re.</i> ²⁴⁸	Fos 104- 111v	1326	Master Jean d'Anneux	<i>De Obedientia</i>
Article 19	<i>Incipit nobilis sermo ad clerum pronunciatus in synodo Traiectensi</i>	Fos 111v- 115v	14 August 1383 ²⁴⁹	Geret Grote	<i>Sermo contra focaristas</i>

MS 114 is comprised of ten quires with the majority of these quires having eleven or twelve folios in the gathering, although the first and third quires remain exceptions with gatherings of seven and seventeen folios, respectively.²⁵⁰ In the first, fifth, and last quires the last folio(s) of the quire have been removed or cut out, leaving the cut remnants of the blank folios in the manuscript.²⁵¹ The end of the second and seventh quires have a catch word, and catchwords also appear on folios 28v and 42v, which are mid-quire. No catchwords coincide with the end of an article.

²⁴⁸ This article is also known as *de obedientia*. Although obedience is mentioned in this article, the true subject of Article 18 is confession. In 1722 Casimir Oudin discusses a different copy of this article in a manuscript held at the library of the Collège de Cholets, however this manuscript seems to no longer exist. Currently, the only copy of this particular article is within MS 114. Casimir Oudin, *Commentarius de scriptoribus ecclesiae*, Volume III, (Fancofurti ad Moenum: Suptibus M.G. Weidmanni, 1722) 802; Penn R. Szitty, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 84.

²⁴⁹ This is the date the sermon was delivered at Utrecht Cathedral.

²⁵⁰ The quires in this compilation are: fos i-4; 5-16; 17-33; 34-45; 46-56; 57-67; 68-79; 80-91; 92-103; 104-115. The very first quire, fos i-4 ends with the remnants of several pieces (at least three folios) of parchment being cut from the quire. While other quires end with cut parchment, this first folio appears to have the most folios cut from its quire.

²⁵¹ Remnants of cut parchment appear after fos 4; 56; 115.

²⁵² The endings of Articles 1, 12, and 17 (see Table A) coincide with the end of their respective quire, however, given the number of articles within in the manuscript, where the two could be expected to coincide randomly on one or more occasions, it is uncertain if this was done deliberately.²⁵³ There is also an obvious change in ink between folios 56 and 57, coinciding with a quire change. Folio 5r contains a discarded version of Article 2, Mathias' *Prologue*. This then begins anew on folio 5v. Articles 1-10, fos i-61v are written by the first scribe, comprised of two columns of forty lines. Articles 11-19, fos 62r-115, are written by the second scribe, and retain the same dimensions as the first part, but each column comprises of approximately fifty lines and smaller script. Folios i-13v are approximately forty lines in length, with the folios thereafter comprising approximately fifty-five lines. As several of the manuscript's articles overlap into the next quire, it is likely the manuscript's two parts were gathered at the same time and were always intended as one single manuscript.²⁵⁴

Folio i-r remains blank apart from the one word 'embolism[us]', written by the first scribe with a slightly later addition to the note.²⁵⁵ At the top of folio iv is a description of texts within the manuscript written in the first hand.²⁵⁶ Thomson refers to this as a table of contents, however this term is overly simplistic as it is both more and less than a traditional table of contents. Curiously, the first half of the manuscript is neatly summarised as a prologue and defence of the revelations of holy Bridget and

²⁵² Catch words appear at the bottom of fos 16v; 28v; 42v; 79v.

²⁵³ Quires which end with the end of an article usually also include a small blank space at the bottom of the second column rather than beginning the next text at the end of a folio. The quires whose ending coincides with the ending of a text are on fos 4; 68; 103.

²⁵⁴ The break in text at the end of Article 10, the change in scribal hand, and the move from Birgittine texts to non-Birgittine texts, could point to MS 114 originally being meant as two separate and smaller manuscripts.

²⁵⁵ It is given this label by Thomson. The appearance of this list of texts from the second part of MS 114, in the first scribe's hand, also lends to the possibility this manuscript was thought out to work together cohesively.

²⁵⁶ Thomson, *Catalogue*, 88.

the titles of each article in this half of the manuscript are not listed.²⁵⁷ The table does, however, list the title of nearly every text in the second half, beginning with the Crown of Thorns (Article 11) which he differentiates from the Office of St Bridget which is a part of this article, and ending with the sermon addressed to the clergy (Article 19). This indicates that the scribe intended to put more emphasis on texts in the second half of the manuscript, so gave these titles in more detail. Woolley's 1927 catalogue mentions an inscription on folio ir of 'pro quinque marcis rig', and for an unknown reason, Thomson's more recent 1989 catalogue records this inscription as no longer existing.²⁵⁸ Despite Thomson's claim, this inscription does clearly exist at the end of the list of contents on folio iv. It is not clear what 'pro quinque mar' rig' is referring to, but Woolley extended this to quinque marcis' (five marks) and see it as a monetary value, but this is an unusual position to place a price on the manuscript. It is possible this phrase is, instead, referring to the last text listed, Article 19 Grote's sermon addressed to the clergy, as it makes up the last five folios of the manuscript and ends unfinished; however, the phrase itself does not appear anywhere else within that article, or indeed the rest of the manuscript.²⁵⁹ Below the list of contents, located in the middle of folio iv, in a sixteenth century hand, is a large inscription, which was later crossed through repeatedly. Thomson's catalogue records the original inscription as reading: 'Sum Frannis Coerpy'. This could be the original reading; however, it is nearly impossible to make out through the contemporary erasure.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Bridget's numerous revelations centred upon a variety of topics, however one of her greatest concerns was the Church and it was affected by good (pious) and bad (sinful) Christians. The collected repository of Bridget's revelations was received over a span of thirty years, from the beginning of Bridget's widowhood, mid-1340s, until her death in 1373. Ingvar Foelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St Birgitta*, (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1993) 28.

²⁵⁸ The inscription Woolley refers to is on fo. i as his folio count is slightly off.

²⁵⁹ Both Thomson and Woolley describes Article 19 as ending 'imperfect'. See: Thomson, *Catalogue*, 89; Woolley, *Catalogue*, 82.

²⁶⁰ Research into the name Frannis Coerpy has returned no results. It is likely 'Frannis' should read 'Francis' however 'Coerpy' is not a known surname.

The manuscript was not intended to be an elaborate show piece or an obviously expensive production: its written contents were only minimally decorated. Enlarged red letters emphasise the start of new sections, or were used to differentiate the beginning of a subsection within a particular text. These enlarged letters usually retain a height of two lines in the column, making their placement pronounced within the text. For the most part, the enlarged letters follow this height pattern, the most notable exception is on folio 48v – an unusually large capital ‘A’ appears measuring a height of six lines and is decorated in both black and red ink and with more emphasis than the other enlarged letters.²⁶¹ This particular ‘A’ appears in the middle of Article 6, Easton’s *Defensorium*, and there is no apparent reason why this deserved more flourish. Red highlighting and underlining adorn titles throughout the manuscript. Natural holes in the parchment were also circled in the same red ink to help the reader in reading across the hole in the folio.²⁶² This red circling appears very frequently in the first half of the manuscript, but becomes less common in the second half.

Marginalia within MS 114 is a rare occurrence and largely used for the sake of clarification; all marginalia in the manuscript are text based. An excellent example of this is within Article 10, Bridget’s *vita*, where the word ‘Swecia’ appears in the margin at the beginning of the *vita* to specify it was the *vita* of Bridget of Sweden.²⁶³ This specification might have felt necessary in order to distinguish Bridget of Sweden from Brigit of Kildare, a fifth/sixth century Irish saint. Notes in margins can also be used to count points or sections within a text. Folio 15v has red ‘iii’ inscription

²⁶¹ While some enlarged letters are larger than the majority, which cover the height of two rows, this particular ‘A’ is, by far, the most embellished within the manuscript.

²⁶² This element of the manuscript added with the chain staple mark in the back cover suggests MS 114 was compiled with the intention to be read regularly by a community of people.

²⁶³ MS 114 fo. 54v.

towards the bottom of column A, however there is not an 'i' or 'ii' anywhere in the margins of folios 1-14 before 'iii'.²⁶⁴

Two scribes seem to be mentioned in the manuscript: but they are not necessarily the scribes of MS 114 itself. Articles 6 and 14, see Table A, each end with the names of a scribe: Article 6, Easton's *Defensorium*, ends with 'manus Ludolphi Alphoride' and Article 14, Cyril's *epistola*, ends with the inscription 'manus Henrici Stelle'.²⁶⁵ As these names appear at the end of particular articles within the manuscript, but do not signal changes in their scribal hand, it is most probable these were names copied from the exemplars used for the individual articles in MS 114. Clearly, the scribes of MS 114 did not always pay close attention to the text they were copying. This is also seen with scribal errors of omission: there is a section of Bridget's *vita* where a section of text is missing due to scribal error; the section of missing text occurs between two manuscript lines, visually there is no break up in text, and the translation does not follow.²⁶⁶

The two hands used to write MS 114 divide the manuscript in nearly equal portions.²⁶⁷ The first half of the manuscript focuses heavily on articles about Bridget and her spiritual legitimacy (refer to Table A, Articles 1-10 and part of 11). The second half of the manuscript, previously less studied by scholars as it does not focus on Bridget, but rather upon obedience: the obedience for priests and religious men as an example to the laity but also the example of at least one other person, Mary Magdalene (refer to Table A, Articles 11-19). There is a focus on confession and the

²⁶⁴ Fo. 20r also has red numbering in the margins.

²⁶⁵ MS 114 fos 49v and 87r, respectively.

²⁶⁶ The missing lines occur on fo. 55v-b. In these missing lines, or words, is mention of the year of marriage Bridget and Ulf spent in virginity, 'devoutly asking God that if they ought to come together he, the Creator of all, would from them create an offspring that would be at his service.' For the full text see: Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 74.

²⁶⁷ The first scribe writes from fos 1-61v. The second scribe writes from fos 62-115v.

importance of confession for their soul. The articles used for this second half draw upon the works of the early Church fathers, whose ideals were valued amongst the *devotio moderna* leaders.

There is an inscription from the first scribe appearing at the bottom of fo. 64r, located in the second scribe's half of the manuscript, proving the two scribes worked together and that the first scribe probably checked the work of the second scribe. This also demonstrates that MS 114 was compiled as one whole, not brought together later.

There have been a small handful of attempts to date MS 114. The two printed catalogues of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library manuscripts have placed vague dates on the manuscript, both based on the scribal hands. Woolley's 1927 catalogue and Thomson's 1989 catalogue both outline the entire contents of MS 114, but go no further than dating the manuscript as 'fifteenth century' based upon its letter forms.²⁶⁸ There have been attempts to provide a closer dating but these only focused upon those articles discussing Bridget, and therefore these dating attempts remain problematic.

One Birgittine scholar has given a very specific, although possibly unreliable, date of 1409 for the manuscript as a whole. In 1977 Carl-Gustaf Undhagen edited *Sancta Birgitta Revelationes*, a large printed volume of Bridget's Latin revelations.²⁶⁹ Undhagen's work attempted to analyse all known manuscripts discussing Bridget and her revelations, and in doing so he claimed the date of 1409 for MS 114.²⁷⁰ He

²⁶⁸ Woolley, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library*, (1927) 80-83; Thomson, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library*, (1989) 87-89.

²⁶⁹ There are a total of twelve 'books' comprising the Birgittine corpus of revelations. These are made up of seven books of *Revelations* I-VII (the *Liber Caelestis*), Book VIII (the *Liber caelestis Imperatoris ad reges*), and four supplement books: *Regula Salvatoris*, *Sermo angelicus*, *Quatuor orations*, and *Revelationes extravagantes*. For the purposes of this research, the recently published volumes of *The Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden* translated by Denis Searby with introductions and notes by Bridget Morris have been used along with earlier editions for the original text. These versions of the translations have grouped the Birgittine corpus documents into four different volumes: Volume 1 (*Liber caelestis* and Books I-III), Volume 2 (*Liber caelestis* and Books IV-V), Volume 3 (*Liber caelestis* and Books VI-VII), and Volume 4 (*Regula Salvatoris*, *Sermo angelicus*, *Quatuor orations*, and *Revelationes extravagantes*).

²⁷⁰ Undhagen, *Sancta Birgitta Revelationes Book I*, 126-7.

derived this from an *explicit* appearing on folio 49vb directly following Article 6, Adam Easton's *Defensorium*: 'explicit defensorium beate birgitte per manus Ludolphi alphordie Anno domini M quadringentesimo ix feria tertia post dominicam quasimodo geniti.'²⁷¹ Undhagen does not acknowledge the possibility this date was itself copied from a version of Easton's *Defensorium* used as a model.²⁷² The appearance of '1409' is the only evidence Undhagen uses in an attempt to date MS 114, and this makes claiming 1409 as the date of origin more uncertain. While Undhagen *could* be correct, his reasoning is faulty, and 1409 should be more accurately considered as the earliest possible, rather than an absolute, date of compilation.

While not addressing the manuscript as a whole, two more modern Birgittine scholars, Roger Ellis and Claire L. Sahlin,²⁷³ have both recently assessed MS 114's Article 5,²⁷⁴ an *epistola* written by an anonymous Franciscan Friar arguing against those who rejected Bridget as a legitimate channel of God.²⁷⁵ Neither author places this article within the broader context of the manuscript, and therefore their analysis does not suggest possible compilation dates for MS 114 as a whole.²⁷⁶ Sahlin dates this *epistola*, Article 5, to between 1391 and 1409 claiming it must have been written in the time between Bridget's canonization in 1391 and 1409, the date stated at the

²⁷¹ Undhagen recognizes the similar scribal hand between Article 6, Easton's *Defensorium*, and Article 2, Master Mathias' *Prologue*, and therefore concludes this *Prologue* in MS 114 should be dated to 1409 as well. This, however, is also a shortsighted conclusion on the part of Undhagen.

²⁷² Easton's original *Defensorium* was written during the 1380s. MacFarlane notes the possible dates of composition as not before 1382-3, but more possibly 1385-8. Leslie J. MacFarlane, 'The Life and Writings of Adam Easton OSB' (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1955), 225.

²⁷³ Ellis and Sahlin's discussion on Article 5 were written in 2005 and 2001, respectively. See: Ellis, 'Text and Controversy', 303-321; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 192-212.

²⁷⁴ MS 114 fos 18v-24v

²⁷⁵ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 192; Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 154-5.

²⁷⁶ Roger Ellis clearly acknowledges Undhagen's previous short-sightedness in his assumptions concerning MS 114. See: Ellis, 'Text and Controversy', 306n8.

end of Article 6.²⁷⁷ Sahlin's date range depends on her assumption about Article 6, taken from Undhagen, however Ellis claims a slightly different date for this particular text, asserting that MS 114 could have been compiled as late as 1417, and stating:

‘The text is better dated sometime between 1391 and 1417 since it notes (1) the failure of the Saint's canonization by Boniface IX in 1391 to stop the mouth of detraction (fols 22vb-23ra), and (2) the adverse effect on the circulation of Birgitta's writings of the long-established Papal Schism (fols 19ra, 22vab). It also quotes from Easton's *Defensorium* (fols 22vb-23rb), dated by Schmidtke (‘Adam Easton's Defense’, p. 35) to 1385-89.’²⁷⁸

The Birgittine articles in MS 114 (Articles 2-11) provide the most information, regarding the dates of origin. Article 2, Master Mathias' *Prologue*, was composed in the 1340s, while Bridget was still alive.²⁷⁹ Article 3, Alphonso of Jaén's *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges*, is known to have been composed between 1370-3, shortly after Bridget's death and during the first attempt at Bridget's canonization.²⁸⁰ Article 6, Adam Easton's *Defensorium*, was commissioned by Pope Urban VI in the 1380s.²⁸¹ Article 8, a letter to the abbey at Vadstena also written by Adam Easton, and is partially dated in MS 114 as 9 February 1390.²⁸² Article 9, Pope Boniface IX's sermon given during the formal celebrations of Bridget's successful canonization and was given on 7 October 1391.²⁸³ Those articles not mentioning Bridget, are

²⁷⁷ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 193.

²⁷⁸ Ellis, ‘Text and Controversy’, 306n14.

²⁷⁹ *Revelations Vol. 1*, 47-52.

²⁸⁰ The most comprehensive research on Alfonso is: Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, and the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi*, (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989).

²⁸¹ MacFarlane dates the *Defensorium* as written not before 1382-3 and possibly during 1385-8. MacFarlane, ‘The Life and Writings of Adam Easton OSB Vol 1’, 221n4.

²⁸² MS 114 fo. 50rv. There is a second extant copy of this letter in Bodleian Library Oxford, Ms Hamilton 7; MacFarlane, ‘The Life and Writings of Adam Easton OSB Vol. 1’, 236.

²⁸³ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 151.

unfortunately harder to give firm dates. Article 18, the only surviving copy of Jean d'Anneux's sermon *de obedientia* is partially dated in MS 114 as 1326.²⁸⁴ The very last article, Gerard Grote's *sermo contra focaristas*, was delivered at Utrecht Cathedral on 14 August 1383.²⁸⁵ Because these dates are pre-1409, 1409 remains a possible date for the manuscript's compilation, however as discussed earlier, 1409 is better thought of as the earliest possible compilation date. The consensus is, however, that the manuscript is from the early fifteenth century.

As well as the date of the manuscript its provenance is at issue, and has been the subject of scholarly debate. Undhagen's 1977 volume assumes the scribal name 'Ludolphi Alphordie' at the end of Easton's *Defensorium* (see Table A), refers to a 'certain Ludolphis in Alford', and explains that 'Alford' is a small market town located in Lincolnshire, England.²⁸⁶ Since Undhagen only looked at the articles connecting to Bridget, he missed the name of the second potential scribe, Henry Stelle, mentioned at the end of Article 14. As an individual this Henry Stelle is also irrelevant to any discussion about the individual scribes responsible for writing the manuscript. He too seems to be a name copied from the original exemplar for his Article so his presence in MS 114 weakens the force of Undhagen's conclusions.²⁸⁷

In a similar manner, Claire L. Sahlin assumes MS 114's origins are English. Sahlin states Article 5's author, possibly, was an English Franciscan, reasoning it was the only known copy of this particular text and the manuscript was housed in Lincoln

²⁸⁴ It has been recorded elsewhere that Jean d'Anneux's treatise was written in 1327. This was taken from a manuscript which no longer exists. See: Oudin, *Commentarius de scriptoribus ecclesiae*, III, 802.

²⁸⁵ Post discusses this sermon in: R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 130.

²⁸⁶ Alphoride is not a known medieval place name variant for Alford Furthermore, there is very clear proof MS 114 was not a product of Lincolnshire, but rather came from Netherlands or Low Countries, a matter which will be discussed shortly. I am very grateful to Professor Philippa Hoskin for our discussion on this matter; Undhagen, *Sancta Birgitta Revelationes Book I*, 126n3.

²⁸⁷ MS 114 fo. 87r.

Cathedral. She further describes the author's quotes of Easton's *Defensorium* as an English interest in Bridget. Sahlin goes on to say: 'Perhaps the Franciscan authored the defense in order to promote the expansion of the Birgittine Order into England; not many years after the text was compiled – in 1415 – King Henry V founded Syon Monastery at Twickenham, England.'²⁸⁸ Like Undhagen, Sahlin is blind, however, to any possibility that the manuscript has non-English origins.

Both Sahlin and Undhagen's claims that MS 114 is an English manuscript are shortsighted; Lincoln Cathedral Library retains records proving that the manuscript was acquired by Michael Honywood, dean of Lincoln Cathedral in the seventeenth century, as part of his own private collection and later donated to the cathedral upon his death. During the English Civil War Dean Honywood was exiled from England and spent time first in Leiden and then Utrecht.²⁸⁹ A known bibliophile, whose previous personal library was confiscated during the war as consequence of his exile, Honywood aimed to replace his lost volumes by acquiring a broad range of books, including medieval manuscripts, whilst on the continent. Honywood meticulously recorded his purchases in alphabetical order including the price he paid for each purchase.²⁹⁰ Honywood's records note the purchase of MS 114 as costing him three shillings. Amongst the hundreds of books and manuscripts Honywood bought during his exile, three shillings is one of the smallest prices he paid, and he may have bought the manuscript simply because it was inexpensive and available. There is a further possible explanation for why Honywood chose to purchase MS 114, apart from his

²⁸⁸ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 194.

²⁸⁹ Thomson, *Catalogue*, xx.

²⁹⁰ Above the entry for MS 114 is also the date 'Jun 24 1648', it is unknown if this was the date these purchases were made, but it is certainly during the period where Honywood resided in the Netherlands. See: Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 276 fo.12v; For a good comprehensive account of Honywood and his contribution to the Lincoln Cathedral Library, see: Naomi Linnell, "Michael Honywood and Lincoln Cathedral Library", in *The Library*, 6(2), 1983, 126-139.

desire to collect books. Honywood was known to purchase religious literature for his mother, although it is unknown if she could read Latin, and Honywood himself had an interest in practical pastoral theology, either reason is plausible for his purchase of MS 114.²⁹¹ Upon his death in 1681 Honywood left his library to Lincoln Cathedral, where MS 114 has remained relatively untouched and understudied. Likewise, the recorded purchase of MS 114 has remained absent from most scholarly study or mention of MS 114.

Honywood could have purchased an English manuscript abroad and returned it to its home country, but there are other reasons to think that MS 114 was compiled abroad. When examining the scribal hands of the manuscript, it is obvious MS 114 is not an English manuscript. Thomson's expert analysis of the manuscript's scribal hands asserts German or Dutch-hybrid origins. Thomson's conclusions remain the most logical, particularly as Honywood's records have already shown that MS 114 was brought into the British Isles in the seventeenth century probably from the Netherlands. Furthermore, the appearance of Grote's sermon, Article 19, is a curious addition for an English manuscript as it comes directly from *devotio moderna* literature, and the movement remained, as we have seen in chapter one, fairly isolated within the Low Countries. It was however, famous at least amongst those who followed his movement and popular with the laity in particular in the Low Countries. The combination of Honywood's purchase of MS 114 in the Low Countries, Article 19, and Thomson's expert analysis makes it quite clear that MS 114 was originally a Low Countries manuscript.

The manuscript then was created as a whole, it is not a compilation of extracts from various other manuscripts, and so it has to be considered as a single piece of

²⁹¹ Thomson, *Catalogue*, xxi.

work, with its overarching themes and order of construction both being intentional. It has been identified as of the early fifteenth century and as coming from the Low Countries. Both these facts strengthen the claim that MS 114 was related to the *devotio moderna* movement. In addition, by studying the themes which appear in the manuscript, we can connect MS 114 with previously known *devotio moderna* texts. The beginning of *devotio moderna*, and the compilation of MS 114, also coincided with the growing commercial culture which was to lead to a rise in literacy and in book ownership.

Bridget of Sweden

As the compilers of MS 114 chose St Bridget of Sweden as their model of ideal obedience, a brief background to Bridget's heritage, marriage, widowhood, and devotional habits is necessary. Bridget was born in 1303 to Swedish nobles Birger Persson and, his second wife, Ingeborg Bengtsdotter.²⁹² Birger was a Swedish *lagman* (lawman)²⁹³ who was described as a generous benefactor of the church and piously practiced confession every Friday.²⁹⁴ Bridget's mother Ingeborg was born into the Swedish aristocratic Folkung family but died when Bridget was eleven years old, leaving her to be cared for primarily by her maternal aunt, Katarina Bengtsdotter in

²⁹² The exact date of Bridget's birth is debatable; it is generally agreed she was born sometime after the New Year in 1303, see: Birgit Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1976), 29-33. Bridget's father, Birger, was probably born in 1265 and Bridget's mother, Ingeborg was probably born after 1275. Päivi Salmesvuori, 'Birgitta of Sweden and her Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela' in *Women and Pilgrimage in Medieval Galicia* ed. Carlos Andrés González-Paz, (New York: Ashgate, 2015), 113-4; Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 24-6; Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 32.

²⁹³ A Swedish *lagman* was an expert in matters of law and jurisdiction, usually in charge of laws within a local province. This practice began at the end of the thirteenth century and continued until around 1347 when King Magnus Eriksson's reign where Sweden obtained its first *landslag* (state law). Salmesvuori, 'Birgitta of Sweden and her Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela', 114n5; Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 67-75.

²⁹⁴ Bridget Morris estimates that Birger was born around 1265 as there is record of him in 1280 referring to him as a 'knight, councilor of state and *lagman*'. See: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 32; A&P 472.

Aspenäs, Östergötland until her marriage.²⁹⁵ Bridget was the second of seven children but only she, her younger sister, also named Katarina, and her youngest sibling Israel, survived to adulthood.²⁹⁶ Not much is known about Bridget's childhood, apart from what appears in her *vita*, the hagiographical account of her life. In the *vita*, Bridget is depicted as having several mystical experiences in her youth. In 1316 Bridget and her sister Katarina were married to brothers Ulf and Magnus Gudmarsson.²⁹⁷ Sons of a knight and councillor of state, acting as *lagman* in Västergötland, these two men were also descended through their mother to the aristocratic Folkung family. As a political arrangement, these two marriages united a royal bloodline, strengthening the aristocracy of the families as well as the families' economic assets.²⁹⁸

Neither Bridget's *vita* nor her revelations, ever appear to oppose marriage, despite the contemporary emphasis on chastity and virginity as a measure of sanctity. After Bridget's death, her daughter Catherine Ulfsdotter testified that Bridget preferred death to marriage, and only married after the family 'compelled, coerced and forced her'.²⁹⁹ As this never appears elsewhere in Birgittine literature, however, it is probable that Catherine's testimony was an attempt to make her mother a more appealing

²⁹⁵ Ingeborg was the daughter of Swedish *lagman* Bengt Magnusson from Östergötland. In some copies of Bridget's canonical *vita* Ingeborg's name is mistakenly given as 'Sigrid', Sigrid was actually Ingeborg's mother. This does not happen with the *vita* in MS 114 as MS 114's *vita* does not specify any names of Bridget's family. Morris gives Ingeborg's death as 21 September 1314. Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 32n52 & 35; For the genealogies of the family see: Folke Wernstedt, *Äldre svenska frälsesläkter. Ättartavlor utgivna av Riddarhusdirektionen*, (Stockholm, 1957-1965).

²⁹⁶ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 35.

²⁹⁷ Klockars argues 1316 as the year of marriage for both Bridget and her sister Katarina. According to canon law, the minimum age requirement would have been twelve years, in 1316 Katarina would have just met the minimum age requirement, see: Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 43; Little is known about Katarina after her marriage, apart from a very short testament in A&P (p. 65) from Katarina's daughter, Ingeborg. Klockars archival work on Bridget is the best modern source on the subject. Morris' work on Bridget, concerning this topic draws from Klockars' work, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 40n8.

²⁹⁸ Nieuwland makes this observation as well, and claims because of Bridget's familial standing, Ulf married a woman who was his 'equal'. See: Jeanette Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage: Theory Versus Practice' in *Birgitta, Hendes Vaerk Og Hendes Klostre i Norden*, ed. Redigeret Af Tore Nyberg, (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1990), 84.

²⁹⁹ Isak Colijn, ed. *Acta et Processus Canonizacionis Beate Birgitte*, (Uppsala: SSFS, ser. 2, Lat. Skrifter 1 1924-31), 305. Translation from: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 41.

candidate for canonization. Contrary to Catherine's statement, Bridget's revelations clearly demonstrate that for her the virtues of obedience, humility, chastity and loving God were more important than a woman's marital status.³⁰⁰ Bridget's own marriage to Ulf appears to have been a union based on mutual affection and friendship.³⁰¹ In her revelations Bridget describes a similar model of marriage as her ideal, although she also accepts a clear gender-hierarchy, following St Paul, and advises that the husband should be the master and the wife should obey.³⁰² According to Bridget's *vita*, she and Ulf spent their first year of marriage in chastity and after this period their sexual relations were prefaced with prayers to God for a child.³⁰³ Between the years 1319 and 1334/1341, Ulf and Bridget had eight children, four boys and four girls, six of whom reached adulthood.³⁰⁴

After Ulf's death in 1344³⁰⁵ Bridget's religious activities became her primary focus.³⁰⁶ As a form of pious humility, Bridget voluntarily chose a life of poverty, distributing her possessions to her children, the poor, and the church before leaving Sweden in 1349 to make Rome her permanent home.³⁰⁷ During her residence, Bridget embarked on several pilgrimages, often joined by her children. It was this widowhood

³⁰⁰ Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage', 84.

³⁰¹ Sources detailing her relationship with Ulf are scarce, Bridget was said to come to love Ulf 'like her own heart.' *A&P*, 479. Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 44-46.

³⁰² Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage', 87.

³⁰³ This part of Bridget's *vita* in MS 114 is missing due to scribal errors, discussed below. It is possible this period of marital virginity lasted several years. Nieuwland argues that Bridget and Ulf did not have intercourse while Bridget was pregnant, showing they only engaged in sex for the sole purpose of procreation. *A&P* 77; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 44-5; Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage', 85.

³⁰⁴ For an outline on Ulf and Bridget's children, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 46-52.

³⁰⁵ This date is given in both the canonical *vita* and on Ulf's gravestone, there is some debate amongst scholars as to whether a more accurate year could be 1346. For this debate, see: Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 240n32.

³⁰⁶ Bridget receives a 'calling vision' from Christ after Ulf's death, the vision summons Bridget to help in the salvation of others. *A&P* 80-1; Morris discusses this time in Bridget's life, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 64-5.

³⁰⁷ Bridget primary objective was to reach Rome in time for the Holy Jubilee in 1350 to wait for Pope Clement VI, at the time residing in Avignon, to return to Rome as well. To what was surely Bridget's dismay, Pope Clement VI did not return to Rome for the Holy Jubilee.

which allowed Bridget to gain her greatest significance within the religious social sphere.³⁰⁸ Being no longer labelled as a ‘wife’, but rather as a ‘widow’, gave Bridget the freedom to be fully committed to her religious vocation.

Bridget’s proximity to the centre of western ecclesiastical power and to those who were in positions of spiritual authority certainly did not hurt her influence. Bridget’s immediate reason for wanting to make the pilgrimage to Rome was the celebration of the Holy Year of Jubilee in 1350.³⁰⁹ She had received a vision, stating she that should not only go to Rome but also, ‘stay there in Rome until you see the supreme pontiff and the emperor there at the same time in Rome, and you shall announce my [God’s] words to them.’³¹⁰ Although Bridget was given a divine order to travel to Rome, her close proximity to both the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope placed her in the middle of several, important, political spheres. Within Bridget’s revelations, we can see just how involved, and influential, Bridget was, politically, in European affairs.³¹¹ Particularly well-known were Bridget’s revelations concerning the Hundred Years War and the politics between England and France.³¹² By inserting herself, and her voice, into a, usually, male-dominated world, Bridget set a precedent for female political involvement.³¹³ On 25 November 1371, Bridget’s entourage left Rome, with three of her children, Alfonso of Jaén, Prior Peter, Master Peter, two

³⁰⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 142.

³⁰⁹ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 93. In her revelations, Bridget generally believed the Church was a divine institution, she admits the Catholic Church of her time was not in an admirable condition because of the many apostate Christians in the Church. *Revelations*, IV 74, 25; Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St Birgitta* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1993), 29.

³¹⁰ *A&P*, 94. Latin: ‘Stabis autem ibi in Roma, donec summum pontificem et imperatorem videbis ibidem insimul in Roma et eis verba mea nunciabis’.

³¹¹ For thorough explorations into the use of Bridget on the Papal and English agendas, see: Eric Colledge, ‘*Epistola solitarii ad reges*: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Birgittine and Urbanist Propaganda’ *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956), 19-49.

³¹² *Revelations* IV, 103-5.

³¹³ Julia Bolton Holloway, *Saint Bride and Her Book: Birgitta of Sweden's Revelations*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 13.

Spanish anchoresses named Elvira and Praxedis, and two Swedish chaplains named Gudmarus Frederici and Magnus Peter.³¹⁴ Bridget spent time at the courts of Giovanna I of Naples and Eleanor, then Queen of Cyprus. After several years abroad Bridget received divine instructions from the Blessed Virgin to return back to Rome one last time.³¹⁵ On 23 July 1373 Bridget died there, in Rome.³¹⁶ Her remains travelled through Europe and throughout Sweden before finally arriving, with ceremony, on 4 July 1374 in Vadstena.³¹⁷ The campaign for her canonization began swiftly after her death, championed by her daughter Catherine and Bridget's various confessors.³¹⁸ Her widespread popularity created debates with learned churchmen who questioned the legitimacy of Bridget's sanctity and her revelations, but despite the controversy, Bridget's canonization was confirmed in 1393 where her popularity reigned throughout Europe.³¹⁹

Bridget in the Manuscript

Bridget's charisma as a mystic and the popularity of her revelations quickly created a cult-like following.³²⁰ The character of Bridget in MS 114 does not,

³¹⁴ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 122.

³¹⁵ *Revelations Book VII* 26.

³¹⁶ 23 July is St Bridget's modern feast day, originally her feast day was celebrated on 7 October. It was not until 1969 Bridget's feast day was changed to the day of her death.

³¹⁷ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 142.

³¹⁸ Bridget's daughter Catherine was the first abbess of Vadstena Abby and in 1484 she was canonized as St Catherine of Sweden. Bridget's legacy and Vadstena Abby remained the seat of strong Swedish Catholicism, the Reformation and King Gustav Vasa (1496-1560) destroyed much of the Catholic culture in Sweden and both Vadstena Abby and Bridget became the target of Lutheran attacks. For a brief discussion on Bridget and Catholicism in Sweden after the Reformation, see: Bergh, 'A Saint in the Making', 371-3.

³¹⁹ Clarissa A. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 170-1; Birgittine scholar, Birger Bergh, notes it was Bridget's ability to make people, particularly those who were in power, feel guilty over their actions which caused some to fear both the character of Bridget and the message her voice carried, see: Birger Bergh, 'A Saint in the Making: St Bridget's Life in Sweden (1303-1349)' in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar Third Volume*, ed. Francis Cairns, (Liverpool: ARCA, 1981), 376.

³²⁰ By the end of the fifteenth century, much of Bridget's cult merged with the cult of St Anne. This was seen particularly strong in the Antwerp/Netherlands area where there was a strong correlation between Anne and Bridget. In the period of 1490-1497 approximately five printed versions of *History of Anne* by Jan Denemarken was printed in Antwerp. For a discussion on the cult of St Anne, see: Ton

however, possess the charismatic qualities for which the historical St Bridget of Sweden was famous for. Rather, the manuscript gives a slightly altered view of Bridget by including only select sources which depict a demure woman.³²¹ The strong and influential voice which speaks clearly through Bridget's nearly seven hundred revelations disappears and is replaced by a woman who exercised obedient silence and only spoke when acting as Christ's channel.³²²

All the articles chosen for inclusion in MS 114 highlight various forms of obedient life, for the first half, Bridget becomes the character who exemplifies this obedient way of living. Article 10, Bridget's saintly life, or *vita*, serves as a central point within the manuscript. Holding a place nearly in the exact centre of the manuscript it is neither the largest nor the smallest article in the manuscript, but it serves as a backbone, connecting those articles defending Bridget with those which do not mention her at all but exhibit the importance of obedience. This version of Bridget's *vita* is very close to the original canonical *vita* created for her canonisation. The significant differences between MS 114's *vita* and Bridget's official canonical *vita* is that MS 114 omits any specification of names or places (including family names), with the exception of Bridget, herself, and a select few saints, and that MS 114 abbreviates the *vita*, omitting some of the stories told there.³²³ Omission of these focuses the audience's attention upon those individuals who are named, and particularly upon Bridget herself. The life depicts Bridget particularly as a pattern of

Brandenburg, St Anne: A Holy Grandmother and her Children' in *Sanctity and Motherhood*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder Bakker (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 31-60, esp. 48.

³²¹ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 79-85 & 93-117. For a discussion on the political influence Bridget had, specifically with King Henry V of England, See: Nancy Bradley Warren, 'Kings, Saints and Nuns: Gender, Religion and Authority in the Reign of Henry V' *Viator* 30 (1999), 307-22.

³²² In Bridget's *vita*, God calls Bridget his 'bride and channel'. MS 114 fo. 57r.

³²³ An important exception is the specification of the appearance of the Virgin Mary and certain select saints, however the names of her parents or relatives, which do appear in the original *vita* are not in MS 114. The specification of 'Sweden' is only mentioned as a note in the margin, almost as an after note. For a version of Bridget's *vita* is identical to the *vita* found in MS 114, but with the inclusion of specifics, see: Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, 71-98.

obedient female behaviour.³²⁴ Bridget's obedience spans several spheres, including obedience to God, her husband, her confessors, and is exhibited through her humility.

This central theme of obedience manifests itself in different forms in the various articles. Bridget herself is first introduced in MS 114 in Article 2, Master Mathias' *Prologue*, a piece which originally acted as an introduction to Bridget's revelations, and depicts a sense of emphatic awe at Bridget's spirituality.³²⁵ Mathias personally knew Bridget and acted as her Swedish confessor while she resided in Sweden. This *Prologue* was written in the 1340s, when not only was Bridget still alive but she had recently become a widow and left Sweden to permanently live in Rome as part of her spiritual journey.³²⁶ The *Prologue* begins by discussing the humility of God but by the end Mathias describes humility in relation to Bridget herself.³²⁷ In doing this Mathias provides an example of Bridget imitating Christ's earthly life. This depiction of the earthly imitation of Christ's life, was a cornerstone of *devotio moderna* teachings, as we have already seen in chapter one. Mathias sets a precedent for understanding the link between humility and celestial spirituality. Throughout the *Prologue* he stresses the obediently humble behaviour demonstrated by God, Christ, and Bridget, saying: 'Accordingly, the truly righteous person is humble by reason of virtue, firm by reason of humility, and calm by reason of firmness of soul. Hence, someone who is truly righteous does not seek his own glory, and so the devil cannot use it to trick him.'³²⁸ In addition, Mathias uses poverty as a means to connect Bridget with Christ: 'A poor woman following a poor man,

³²⁴ The readership of this manuscript is discussed in a following chapter. Briefly, it was compiled for the purposes of education and exemplification concerning obedient female behaviours.

³²⁵ Originally, this *Prologue* was composed to preface Bridget's revelations and impress upon the reader her legitimacy as a visionary. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 121.

³²⁶ Morris, 'Introduction', *Revelations Volume I*, 41.

³²⁷ MS 114, fo. 6r.

³²⁸ MS 114, fo. 6r. Translation taken from *Revelations Volume I*, pg. 48.

Christ'.³²⁹ By directly linking Christ's acts of humility with Bridget's, Mathias emphasizes Bridget's sanctity, for to question her status would also question Christ's divinity. Mathias links Bridget's obedience and humility to the likeness of Christ, and further stresses her spiritual strength by illustrating oppositional traits. Those who exhibit the traits of lust, greed, or pride are, according to Mathias, directly connected to the devil, as these were the Devil's own sins.³³⁰

By showing how Bridget avoided these sins, thanks to the divine aid she received, Mathias demonstrates Bridget's great humility. Mathias cautions that the Devil's sins infect the world with further sinful temptation. Annihilation of these sins, greed, lust, and pride, is achieved by choosing the paths Bridget took: humility conquers pride and poverty destroys greed. Humility was a significant part of living an obediently spiritual life: to be obedient a Christian should live humbly. Throughout the manuscript living humbly is depicted as the ideal, a thought echoed throughout *devotio moderna*.³³¹ Both Bridget and Mary Magdalene's chosen lives of poverty demonstrate their humility and honours the precedent set by Christ's humanity.

Bridget, who was a mother of at least eight children, hardly fitted the virginal saint mould.³³² The compilers of this manuscript were, however, less concerned with finding a virgin-saint than with discovering a saint who could provide a pattern of practical imitation for their female audience and Bridget was certainly that. Her sanctity was said to be particularly important *because*, not *despite*, the fact that she had lived a sexually active life.³³³ By not being a virgin, Bridget became an

³²⁹ MS 114, fo. 6r.

³³⁰ *Revelations Vol. 1*, 48 & 51.

³³¹ A similar approach of combining the quality of humility within the larger theme of obedience, both to God and to one's husband, is discussed within the context of Elisabeth of Hungary, see: Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 92-93 & 112-113.

³³² Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 170-184.

³³³ Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 239.

accessible role for wives and mothers; a position a virgin saint could not so easily take.³³⁴ A virgin life-style was not a realistic option for most fifteenth-century women as their actions were often dictated by the various men in their lives.

Adam Easton takes a similar position in his *Defensorium beatae Birgittae*, Article 6, again intended to defend Bridget's spirituality and sanctity. He acknowledges women were, without doubt, inferior to men,³³⁵ because of 'the curse' put on all women in Paradise. He goes on also to admit that some women can rise above their 'liability' if they are 'exceptional or unique in their characteristics or deeds'.³³⁶ It is in this latter category that Easton places Bridget, although he does not limit this category only to Bridget. By including this article, the manuscript maintains the superiority of the male sex while still supporting Bridget's exceptionality. Bridget is said to have held a high reverence for those in the church.³³⁷

Alfonso of Jaén, in his *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges*,³³⁸ declares that, most importantly, Bridget's obedience to her confessors proved that her visions were genuine.³³⁹ This particular point becomes significant in creating the boundaries of what is determined obedient for the female gender. Alfonso, while emphasising Bridget's spirituality and deserving status as 'saint', clearly places Bridget beneath a man. His determination to describe her spiritual obedience also adds a further characteristic: an obedient female needs to be under the authority of a man. More so,

³³⁴ This view was different from earlier views in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, where virgin was the favoured presentation of the holy female. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints Lives and the Female Reader' *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27.4 (1991), 315-6.

³³⁵ Schmidtke, "'Saving' by Faint Praise: St Birgitta of Sweden, Adam Easton and Medieval Antifeminism', in *The American Benedictine Review* 33 (1982), 150.

³³⁶ *ibid.*

³³⁷ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 121.

³³⁸ MS 114, fos 7v-17.

³³⁹ F.R. Johnston, 'English Defenders of St Bridget' in *Studies in St Birgitta and the Brigittine Order Volume 1*, ed. James Hogg (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993), 264. In Article 10, the saint's life, Bridget is specified as having obeyed her confessors in 'all hardships'. See: MS 114, fo. 56r-a.

the authority of the man is not specified to her husband, rather it is her male spiritual adviser.

Other articles contained in MS 114 also discuss Bridget as an obedient woman. Her ability to serve her husband dutifully yet still practice an obedient spiritual life-style were the aspects of her life considered worthy of imitation. Master Mathias' *Prologue* depicts Bridget as obediently 'humble and meek in spirit'.³⁴⁰ While listing these desirable qualities, Mathias lists Bridget's desire for the widow's sobriety even while married.³⁴¹ It was after she was 'released from the law binding her to a husband' that she was able to distribute her property amongst her children and continue her widowhood in poverty.

The *vita* is the article in the manuscript which gives greatest insight into Bridget as a woman. In her *vita*, Bridget is depicted as a model of obedience in both the earthly and spiritual worlds. She is depicted as an obedient daughter when she does not fight the marriage her father had arranged for her. Bridget's role as wife, of course, comes with many gendered implications and expectations. Coming from an aristocratic Swedish family from an economic and social viewpoint, Bridget would have understood the importance that her marriage had for her entire family. Bridget's marriage to her husband, Ulf, and her sister's simultaneous marriage to Ulf's brother, united the two families' economic holdings and further tied both families to the Swedish nobility. In the *vita* Bridget is shown to balance her duties as obedient Christian and obedient wife. She is a model of womanhood worthy of imitation.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ MS 114, fo. 5v. Translation taken from: *Revelations Vol. 1*, 47.

³⁴¹ *Revelations Vol. 1*, 49.

³⁴² For the idea of late medieval female examples, see: Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 218-219.

The *vita* depicts Bridget as being obediently attentive to her spiritual duties of prayer, confession, fasting, religious reading, and almsgiving.³⁴³ Each spiritual duty is addressed in its own section within the *vita*. The *vita* specifies with regards to Bridget's fasting, that she did so 'secretly' so it was not 'noticed by her husband or by others'.³⁴⁴ It is also careful to mention that while she was very dedicated to these spiritual duties, she did not let them consume her life so she was then inattentive to her duties as a wife. By mentioning Bridget's wifely duties - and that she did not neglect them despite her strict spiritual habits - the manuscript continues to impress upon its audience the idea an obedient female was under the authority of her husband, or perhaps more accurately, she had duties to her husband labelling her disobedient if she ignored. Curiously, neither the *vita* nor the rest of MS 114 specify what duties were required by Bridget as a wife: perhaps these would have been thought to be only too well understood by any women to whom Bridget was shown as an example. Instead, the duties of her spiritual life, prayer, fasting, confession, et cetera, *are* detailed and then placed in the context of her domestic life, ensuring the audience Bridget did not neglect her role as wife.³⁴⁵

Several of the articles choose to recognize Bridget's earthly marriage to Ulf as part of her life cycle, knowing that this is leading to her widowhood and her ensuing status as Bride of Christ, dedicated to a spiritual rather than an earthly husband. Bridget's *vita* depicts Bridget's choice to enter into marriage as one of an 'honourable' choice.³⁴⁶ Therefore, the manuscript is not interested in promoting a virginal life style as the only possible route to a holy life; instead it is interested in

³⁴³ MS 114, fos 56r-a-56r-b.

³⁴⁴ MS 114, fo. 56r-b.

³⁴⁵ At points, it is mentioned Bridget encouraged her husband to go to confession or encouraged him to enter a life of chastity when she reached a point where she no longer able to bear children. This pertains more to Bridget's spiritual obedience than to her temporal obedience as a wife.

³⁴⁶ MS 114, ff. 55v-b.

promoting a balance between two worlds where obedience is a form of sexual control. Bridget, famous for living a sexual life and becoming a mother, was also able to convince her husband to practice ‘perfect continence’ for certain periods of their marriage, following divine instruction.³⁴⁷ This, according to Mathias, in his *Prologue*, contributed to her ‘perfect grace’ for which Christ chose her to be his Bride.³⁴⁸

How Bridget and Ulf chose to approach their conjugal debt to each other does fall under the theme of sexuality: however, it is also an important aspect of obedience – especially aspects of an obedient wife. To deny her husband the right to consummate their marriage brought several issues. Lack of consummation threatened the legal validity of their marriage. More importantly, within the context of the aims and themes of MS 114, lack of completing the conjugal debt *could* have meant that Bridget was portrayed as a woman dedicated to her Christian duties, but it would equally have cast her in the role of a disobedient wife. This would have fought against the main, purposeful, portrayal the manuscript wishes to make of Bridget, because it is Bridget’s ability to balance both celestial and earthly duties which made her an important example. Therefore, the manuscript is careful to make this a mutual decision of husband and wife.

The manuscript discusses how Bridget dealt with having a sexual history and her obedience to her husband. This is important because Bridget’s sexual activity throughout her life then does not become an issue of sexual intercourse, more it becomes an act of obedience. Bridget’s sexual life with her husband Ulf contributed to her wifely duties, yet it also contributed to her duties as a mother by allowing her, with God’s blessing, to become a mother and bear children. It also remains significant

³⁴⁷ *Revelations Vol. 1*, 49.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*

because it shows how to choose duty over desire when it comes to sexual relations, how to be married and still reach salvation. When women entered marriage and consummation thereof, they broke away from the virginal model of womanhood, and entered into the wifely model.³⁴⁹ Bridget becomes an important model of womanhood because she *was* a wife. Because of this, Bridget's own sexual history, and her understanding of what lies within the boundaries of obedient female behaviour become a part of the history of medieval spirituality.

It must be remembered that the behaviour Bridget exhibits in this manuscript is shown both through the interpretation of the authors of the individual articles and in the content of the choices of those who were responsible for compiling the various articles into one comprehensive manuscript. Therefore, the manuscript gives us two views important to late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century society. Firstly, it shows how men, concerned with devotion, perceived the female ideal, secondly, because the readership or audience were women, women were therefore at the receiving end of the information in this manuscript. Whether or not the women who received this manuscript applied the message from MS 114 cannot be known, but the fact that this is what was being preached is significant in this analysis. As Catherine M. Mooney comments, by studying such sources we are able to find 'new ways of interpreting these documents to understand better how the gender of medieval authors influences the ways in which they either self-represent or represent others, others who also are "gendered" in very specific ways.'³⁵⁰ In this way, we can better understand not only the authors and the subjects within the texts, but also the readers and audience who were at the receiving end.

³⁴⁹ Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 224.

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*

As an historical character, and as a saint, Bridget was famed as a champion of a reformed church and a significant voice in fourteenth-century spirituality. One of her most celebrated acts was encouraging the Pope to move his papacy from Avignon back to Rome, where she thought it belonged. Bridget's known desire for a reformed church could have been what initially attracted *devotio moderna* to idea of Bridget as an obedient model.³⁵¹ The charismatic Bridget who is so often remembered in modern scholarship is not the Bridget represented in MS 114, and it certainly does not align with an obedient female form.³⁵² Those authors of the pieces contained in MS 114 who were contemporaries of Bridget, were concerned with ensuring Bridget was not portrayed as a woman who was too outspoken. In fact, much of Bridget's voice is downplayed in several of the articles, and instead she is transformed to a quiet and obedient woman. Quiet and obedience must not be mistaken with complete silence. Rather, the articles in the manuscript depict Bridget using her voice when she had something of worth to say.

The importance put upon obedient speech is also stressed in Article 4 of MS 114. This, written by Master Peter, General Confessor at Vadstena, defends Bridget's revelations against detractors by reminding readers that Popes Gregory XI and Urban VI had already validated Bridget's revelations as legitimate. The bulk of Article 4 is dedicated to reiterating a defence for Bridget, in which he mentions the importance of the practices of properly obedient speech. Peter cautions against excessive speech as well as too little speech.³⁵³ Speech, according to Peter, should be restrained when and

³⁵¹ Auke Jelsma, 'The Appreciation of Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) in the Fifteenth Century' in *Women and Men in Spiritual Culture XIV-XVII Centuries: A Meeting of North and South*, eds Elisja Schulte van Kessel, (The Hague: Netherlands Government Publishing Office, 1986), 171.

³⁵² Bridget had infamous disagreements with multiple European kings and queens. Bridget, along with Catherine of Sienna, has also been credited with convincing the Pope to move from Avignon back to Rome. See: Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 218.

³⁵³ MS 114, fos 17-18v.

if there is no purpose to it. Peter continues his tale of caution, by explaining the danger of too much silence: ‘for those who take notice of what is evil in their neighbours, and yet refrain their tongue in silence, withdraw, as it were, the aid of medicine from observed sores, and become the causes of death, in that they would not, in Christ, cure the venom which they could have cured’.³⁵⁴ And so, we have Peter defending both Bridget’s early silence and her later use of her voice as part of her divine obedience.

The Second Part of MS 114

While the first part of MS 114 (Articles 1-10) concentrates upon Bridget as a model of obedient piety, the second part of the manuscript is curiously lacking in character-driven models; only Mary Magdalene appears as a woman within the narrative. The compilers chose, instead, to add to their already extensive demonstration of Bridget with articles supporting their ideal way of life. Article 12 (see Table A), a copy of Pseudo-Bernard’s *de honestate vita* echoes some of *devotio moderna*’s beliefs in stressing the importance of caring for one’s soul by keeping Christ’s image within the soul: doing so avoided corrupting the body.³⁵⁵ *De honestate vita*’s description of how to live a good life, with its emphasis on upholding the image of Christ, mirrors many *devotio moderna* works, particularly Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*. The idea and importance of self-knowledge aided in both wisdom and piety is seen throughout works on both Bridget and *devotio moderna* literature.

³⁵⁴ MS 114, fo. 17v-a.

³⁵⁵ MS 114, fos 66-67v. Nigel Morgan discusses several devotional texts which were owned by Margaret of York, including a copy of Pseudo-Bernard’s *de honestate vita*, see: Nigel Morgan, ‘Texts of Devotion and Religious Instruction Associated with Margaret of York’ in *Margaret of York, Simon Marmon and The Visions of Tondal* ed. Thomas Kren, (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992) 63-76.

By carefully considering both Bridget and the movement it becomes clear why *devotio moderna* might choose to use Bridget as its exemplar and why the non-Bridget articles in the manuscript were chosen. At first the collection of articles spread across the two halves the manuscript appear unrelated. However, the repeated themes which the authors of the articles use compliment the ideals of the *devotio moderna* compilers. Both Bridget and *devotio moderna* fought for monastic and church reform, arguing that the contemporary church was filled with corruption. Bridget was a famous supporter of the papal seat residing in Rome. A position with which *devotio moderna* agreed; this could even have been the initial bond which encouraged that movement to use Bridget as a model. The Church fathers who feature in the second half (see authors for Articles 11-19 in Table A) demonstrated similar ideals. Specifically, Article 13 *de sancto Ieronimo*, and Article 14 an *epistola* from (Pseudo-) St Cyril to Augustine of Hippo, both address the death of St Jerome, himself a saint of particular importance for the *devotio moderna* movement. These two letters often appeared with a third letter from (Pseudo-) St Augustine, *epistola de magnificentiis Hieronymi ad Cyrillum* – however this third letter is not included in MS 114. All three letters address Jerome’s last hours and death. Article 13 is addressed to Pope Damascus who vehemently defended the church against schism—a reality thirteenth and fourteenth-century society faced.

Bridget’s canonization was confirmed in 1393. This close chronology between Bridget’s confirmation as a saint and the compilation of MS 114 demonstrates that the manuscript – like the later sister books – concentrated on recently deceased pious women, not on older saints even when those were of long standing. There is a degree of trust in Bridget as an obedient model for their readers, despite contemporary questions about her status, or lack thereof, as a saint. Furthermore, *devotio moderna*

valued the written lives of individuals and widely distributed these lives. Throughout their success as a movement; both the laity and religious in their movement shared this appreciation.³⁵⁶

Perhaps the most obvious connection between MS 114 and *devotio moderna* is in the second half of the manuscript in the inclusion of Article 19, Grote's *sermo contra focaristas* given to a synod gathered at Utrecht Cathedral on 14 August 1383, a sermon chosen to complete the manuscript. The sermon begins with Isaiah 52: 11-12: 'Depart, depart go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the Lord's house (12) But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, God of Israel will be your rear guard.' Grote uses this biblical passage to describe the effect the impurity of a woman can have on a priest who should be devoted to Church and a chaste life. He attempts a strong argument against priestly marriages and the temptation women bring along with their presence. Initially invited by the bishop of Utrecht to deliver this sermon, it is this sermon which lost him his privilege to preach.³⁵⁷

However, as a comparison to the *vita* of St Bridget, there is another article which attracts attention. The only other woman who appears as a significant character³⁵⁸ within the manuscript is Mary Magdalene in Article 15, (Pseudo-) Origen's *Homilia de Maria Magdalena*.³⁵⁹ Using Mary Magdalene as a supporting

³⁵⁶ Miri Rubin, 'Cults of Saints' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 489.

³⁵⁷ Mathilde Van Dijk, 'Wolves Become Lambs: The Conversion of Lukewarm Religious and Worldly Clerics in *Devotio Moderna*' in *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics in Conversion*, eds Jan N. Breman, Wart J. van Bekkum and Arie L. Molendijk, (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 61 & 61 n7; C.C. de Bruin, E. Persoons, and A.G. Weiler. *Geert Grote en de Moderne Devotie*, (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1984), 44-5.; Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 130.

³⁵⁸ Article 1 in the manuscript is titled as *Prayers to the BVM*, however they appear as standard prayers for matins without much construction of the Virgin as a character.

³⁵⁹ MS 114, fos 87v-89v. There remains no modern English translation of this homily. McCall uses several excerpts from the homily, compiled from comparisons of various versions of this homily. In concluding his research, McCall leaves an Appendix of existing manuscripts and printed editions, in various languages, which contain this particular homily. Technically, McCall's research looks at

character also fits with the overall intentions of the manuscript. Mary Magdalene had, since the twelfth century, generated a cult following, and both Mary Magdalene and Bridget fit the model of late medieval, moral, obedience.³⁶⁰ The figure of Mary Magdalene came to epitomise the ideal for holy women within the Christian world because of her repentant attitude towards her sexual past.³⁶¹ Mary's act of repentance and conversion to a chaste life became a model to follow. The fourteenth century saw Mary Magdalene grow even more popular as a subject for sermons because she had 'chosen the better part'.³⁶² The later Middle Ages also saw the common understanding of Mary Magdalene as an *apostola*, or referred to as an apostle to the apostles.³⁶³

The *homilia de Maria Magdalena* depicts Mary Magdalene weeping besides Christ's tomb, and then further describes Christ's appearance to her after his resurrection.³⁶⁴ This particular homily was popular amongst devotional texts between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Early copies of this text were accompanied

Chaucer's *De Maria Magdalena*, however Chaucer's version is actually a Middle English version of the Latin text belonging to (Pseudo-) Origen. For McCall's Appendix, see: McCall, 'Chaucer and the Pseudo Origen *De Maria Magdalena*', 505-9.

³⁶⁰ I specify 'late medieval' as the understanding of Mary Magdalene as an obedient role model changed from previous understandings, by the fourteenth century Mary Magdalene was revered for her obedient and humble repentance. Dyan Elliott discusses the twelfth century (and after) societal fascination with 'the literary personification of philosophical and moral abstractions as female goddesses.' See: Dyan Elliott, 'Gender and the Christian Traditions' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.

³⁶¹ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, 'Devoted Holiness in the Law World' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 472.

³⁶² Katherine Ludwig Jansen, 'A Sermon on the Virtues of the Contemplative Life' in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 124; Luke 10:42.

³⁶³ Later medieval preachers use the reputation of Mary Magdalene as an *apostola* to connect Bridget to being 'spiritually male'. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 170. This particular homily also specifically describes Mary Magdalene as being similar to Christ, in another effort to tie a female as 'spiritually male'. M. Jennings, 'The art of the Pseudo-Origen Homily' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 5 (1974), 141.

³⁶⁴ McCall, 'Chaucer and the Pseudo Origen *De Maria Magdalena*', 492. Interestingly, Bridget also experienced the resurrection of Christ through knowledge given to her by the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Blessed Virgin passed along wisdom to Bridget, one being it was the Blessed Virgin who Christ appeared to first, not Mary Magdalene. See: Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 97; Katherine Ludwig Jansen, 'Maria Magdalena: *Apostolorum Apostola*' in *Women Preachers and Prophets*, eds Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 57-96.

together with the works of the early church fathers, however fourteenth and fifteenth-century editions of the piece were found in devotional miscellanies with the manuscript as a whole choosing to focus on a particular theme. Although not known to appear together elsewhere, Articles 13 and 14, two pseudo-authored *epistolae*, detail the death of early church father, St Jerome. Article 13, written by (Pseudo-) Eusebius of Cremona, and Article 14 written by (Pseudo-) Cyril, were usually accompanied by a third pseudo-authored letter: *epistola de magnificentiis hieronymi ad cyrillum* by (Pseudo-) Augustine. Articles 13, 14 and the (Pseudo-) Augustine letter, the latter of which is not present in MS 114, were known to circulate widely throughout Europe, but the concern over Church father Jerome's death certainly echoes similar concerns *devotio moderna* held for early church fathers. Damascus, Bishop of Rome, and to whom Article 13 is addressed, often defended the Catholic Church against schisms: a current concern for fourteenth and fifteenth-century *devotio moderna* adherents.

It is possible that *homilia de Maria Magdalena* was used as a replacement for the (Pseudo-) Augustine letter concerning St Jerome (mentioned above as unusually missing in this manuscript which includes its two common companion pieces) in order to place another female character within the manuscript. Like Articles 13, 14, and the (Pseudo-) Augustine *epistola*, Article 15 is also a pseudo-authored text, being attributed to Origen. Original locations for any of the texts is hard to determine as they appeared to have circulated widely throughout Europe.³⁶⁵ The homily opens as a commentary to John 20: 11-18, and bases the majority of its contents on other various pieces of biblical material.³⁶⁶ As a piece of Latin religious literature, the homily is

³⁶⁵ McCall argues the original location of this text was France. See: McCall, 'Chaucer and the Pseudo Origen *De Maria Magdalena*', 491-509.

³⁶⁶ Jennings notes this homily contains sixty separate biblical references, and at least six of these passages are all from John 20. Jennings, 'The Art of the Pseudo-Origen Homily', 140.

favoured by scholars for its construction and ‘literary sophistication.’³⁶⁷ The Latin prose remains simplistic and rhythmical,³⁶⁸ however, the homily is presented with a dramatic feel and allusion, creating an emotional appeal for the reader.

The main subject of this text is Mary Magdalene, however her story is narrated by an anonymous preacher who presents his sermons as accessing Mary Magdalene’s innermost thoughts.³⁶⁹ The contents of the manuscript set out a strong theme: Mary Magdalene’s ‘steadfast love and sorrow’ for Christ.³⁷⁰ This love and sorrow that Mary Magdalene exhibits translates to her repentance of previous sinful life.³⁷¹ The preacher continues to transfer the image of Mary Magdalene into the image of a feeble and vulnerable woman. Mary is only able to weep in mourning, and the preacher attempts to comfort her but finding this impossible, he questions why Christ left her in such a state. Claiming to be unable to comprehend the situation, the preacher ponders on Christ’s own words regarding Mary Magdalene: ‘Mary had chosen the best part which shall not be taken from her.’ The preacher’s ponderings continue with the acknowledgement that the ‘best part’ of Mary Magdalene was Christ, which had been taken from her at his death. Without the ability to console Mary Magdalene for such an incredible loss, he leaves her to wallow in her sorrow, which he believed would ultimately kill her. Christ’s appearance, according to the homily, is not first given to Mary Magdalene. It is actually first given to the anonymous preacher, narrating her tale. While Mary Magdalene weeps, and the

³⁶⁷ Jennings also refers to the homily as written in the sermon construction style of *modus antiquus*. Jennings, ‘The art of the Pseudo-Origen Homily’, 139-40.

³⁶⁸ Jennings, ‘The art of the Pseudo-Origen Homily’, 142.

³⁶⁹ We see insight into the narrator as well, see: Jennings, ‘The art of the Pseudo-Origen Homily’, 147.

³⁷⁰ McCall, ‘Chaucer and the Pseudo Origen *de Maria Magdalena*’, 498.

³⁷¹ It is worthy to note, even when depicted as a biblical whore, Mary Magdalene benefited from a social status which kept her separated from a common prostitute. This, perhaps, aided in constructing Mary Magdalene as the ideal, repentant, Christian rather than the former prostitute. See: Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 120-6.

preacher watches on, Christ rises and asks the preacher what has caused Mary Magdalene such an immense amount of sorrow. Aghast, the preacher confronts Christ explaining it was his loss causing her such great grief. At this, Mary Magdalene turns and mistakes Christ for a gardener, and in her sorrowful way, asks where Christ's body has been taken. It is not until the preacher begs Christ to reveal himself to Mary Magdalene that she is finally released from her sorrowful pain.

The construction of the character of Mary Magdalene in the homily shows how this had changed through centuries in Latin Christendom. The Mary Magdalene who appears in this thirteenth-century homily bears little resemblance to the 'Mary Magdalene' who appears in the Bible.³⁷² The biblical story of Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet with her tears become not only a symbol of her service to Christ, but of her obedient and heartfelt service to the world.³⁷³ Her tears echo her piety and devotion to Christ, while her conversion serves as an example to all. The symbol of Mary Magdalene's tears appears frequently throughout the homily. Her weeping represented her love for Christ and her remaining life source; which are one and the same. She has been converted: from prostitute to repentant lover of Christ, and in this conversion she becomes the epitome of penitence and is able to achieve a state greater than any other saint.³⁷⁴ Mary Magdalene now represents the rewards that penance can bring.³⁷⁵ Tears and the act of crying were emotive devotional expressions throughout *devotio moderna* literature and are represented in MS 114.

³⁷² Arthur Goldhammer, and Jacques Dalarun, transl., 'The Clerical Gaze' in *History of Women in the West, Volume II: Silences of the Middle Ages*, eds Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 32.

³⁷³ Mulder-Bakker, 'Devoted Holiness in the Lay World', 474.

³⁷⁴ Mary Magdalene is described as the epitome of penitence in a sermon delivered on her feast day, July 22, 1305 in Italy. For a printed translation of this sermon, see: Jansen, 'A Sermon on the Virtues of the Contemplative Life', 117-125.

³⁷⁵ Miri Rubin helpfully summarises this idea: 'In the hands of preachers who understood well the desires of their female audience, here was a saint to be emulated.' Rubin, 'Cult of Saints', 488.

These emotive actions also reflect the inspiration they took from the Desert Fathers.³⁷⁶ Crying, in several ways, was understood as a form of extreme piety. While crying could be understood as an act of contrition, it could also be seen as an expression of love, and a form of affective piety.

The homily itself is fascinating in its depiction of not only Mary Magdalene, but also of the anonymous preacher. The preacher becomes a part of the scene. It is he who is first given sight and understanding of the resurrected Christ. In fact, he converses with Christ while Mary Magdalene is in her inconsolable state, and he understands at first sight that the man who has appeared is Christ, whereas Mary Magdalene mistakes him for a gardener. Although it is Mary Magdalene who is supposed to be the heroine of this biblical scene, it is actually the preacher who is her champion and defender, and undercuts her splendour at being the first who saw Christ resurrected. Why this particular motif was chosen for a homily about Mary Magdalene is unknown. It could have been a tactic to shift the balance of authority in this particular biblical event, as the appearance of the preacher gives the event a sense of male-authority, yet his anonymity does not misplace the importance of Mary Magdalene. Furthermore, it could have been done in an effort to portray a more general gendered-obedience, in placing the woman as the humble yet submissive vessel.³⁷⁷

The idea of Mary Magdalene as the ‘first witness’ was heavily criticised as many believed the ‘first witness’ was the Virgin Mary, Christ’s mother. Bridget in

³⁷⁶ Mathilde Van Dijk, ‘Henry Mande: The Making of a Male Visionary in *Devotio Moderna*’ in *Saints, Scholars, and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies*, eds Mathilde van Dijk and Renee Nip, Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 149.

³⁷⁷ For a discussion on female-obedience as a practice of submissive humility, see: Carla Casagrande, and Clarissa Botsford transl., ‘The Protected Woman’ in *History of Women in the West, Volume II: Silences of the Middle Ages*, eds Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 90.

particular was one of these critics – believing the Virgin Mary, as Christ’s mother, would have been the first witness.³⁷⁸ However, the Birgittine articles within MS 114 uphold the belief that Mary Magdalene was the first witness.³⁷⁹ In retrospect, knowing both what is in MS 114 and how Bridget is represented elsewhere, it is interesting to consider the inconsistencies between the main characters of MS 114 and the authors of the manuscript.

Regardless of the debate over the ‘first witness’, using Mary Magdalene as a support for the obedient character already portrayed by Bridget in her *vita* is appropriate, particularly in the later Middle Ages when the character of Mary Magdalene became a model of contemplative life. The characters of both Mary Magdalene and Bridget could appeal to women who were seeking a devout lifestyle yet had been sexually active for one reason or other.³⁸⁰ Additionally, like Bridget, Mary Magdalene *chose* poverty in order to abandon worldly riches and follow Christ.

MS 114 draws these parallels in several texts. Easton’s *defensorium* uses the reputation of Mary Magdalene to justify Bridget’s use of legitimate female speech and argue women were not excluded from divine revelations based on gender.³⁸¹ Citing Ambrose, Easton justifies the actions of Mary Magdalene by explaining she was instructed to ‘announce’ to her household, not to preach publicly.³⁸² Furthermore, Easton compares the similarities between Mary Magdalene’s experiences in witnessing the resurrection to Bridget’s own revelation when Christ

³⁷⁸ Bridget’s criticisms on this appear in her *sermo angelicus* which is not a part of MS 114.

³⁷⁹ Jansen has argued the possibility Bridget identified with the Blessed Virgin as being the first witness because of the status of both of them as mothers. See: Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 263.

³⁸⁰ Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 234 & 234 n143.

³⁸¹ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 187-9; Easton, *defensorium* ed. Schmdmidtke, 185-6, 189. Later, Easton argues Christ chose to appear to Mary Magdalen, a woman, to show not all women followed the reputation of Eve but rather women brought ‘the dawn of Christ resurrected in glory.’

³⁸² Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 187.

instructed her to build a new monastic rule.³⁸³ Article 5, the Franciscan *epistola*, also links Bridget to Mary Magdalene by reminding its audience Bridget died the day after Mary Magdalene's feast day of 22 July.³⁸⁴ In all the instances where Mary Magdalene is mentioned in MS 114, it is her contemplative life style and her extreme love for God which is emphasized and deemed important as it is in this form of her life she is pure and free of doubt.³⁸⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has identified some of the characteristics, people, and themes of Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114. The compilers of MS 114 were not concerned with creating a manuscript about Bridget – as some scholars have previously suggested. If this were the case, any of Bridget's numerous revelations would have appeared along with Articles 1-10, as they were more popular by far in the fifteenth century than her defences or *vita*. Rather, those responsible for compiling MS 114 wished to present her obedient behaviour, thoughts, and ideals as these mirrored their own concerns. At the time of MS 114's compilation *devotio moderna* was a young movement, gaining popularity, and retaining a contemporary societal concern for their lay and religious members. Bridget as a newly canonized saint and a woman who never took vows represented a figure with whom their members could identify. The movement habitually used examples of individuals to teach their followers how to live a life obedient to Christ, and they found Bridget to be a prime example who therefore, in MS 114, became a prominent teaching tool. She was not part of their

³⁸³ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 188-9.

³⁸⁴ MS 114, fo. 20v.

³⁸⁵ In her discussion, Jansen compares this way of life to that of the woman he identifies as Mary Magdalen's sister, Martha, who lived an 'active life'. Jansen, 'Sermon on the Virtues of Contemplative Life', 121.

movement, but she provided a good example of how they want their future female, *devotio moderna*, examples to act. This substantial manuscript was compiled with the purpose of study and instruction.

The important themes for both MS 114 and the *devotio moderna* movement are those concerning female humility and obedience. The movement taught this through its texts of exemplary wives. Bridget is shown to act as an example obedient wife and Christian, who does not let wifely duties prevent her obedient Christian behaviour, nor does she let her spiritual adherence limit her performance of duties to her husband. She is also shown as example of female vocal obedience. The idea of confession as a form of speech is further stressed with articles retained in the last half of the manuscript as several address the importance, and instruct, how priests should conduct confession to their parish.

This chapter, and the previous chapter, have attempted to demonstrate the importance of the ideas of obedience held for the *devotio moderna* movement. Records retained from Honywood's time in the Low Countries during the seventeenth century as well as dating the scribal hands of MS 114 further prove that MS 114 was in the right place at the right time to be considered an early *devotio moderna* piece, and analysis of the actual contents aligns with these *devotio moderna* ideas of obedience. The manuscript provides instruction for the male-religious in how *they* should *teach* their lay women to behave. Bridget's role as an example of obedience in word and gender will be considered in the following chapters. This manuscript follows the themes popular in *devotio moderna* literature and uses important works in *devotio moderna* teaching. The first years of the fifteenth century were early in the movement's development, meaning there were few actual *devotio moderna* texts available to use in such a compilation as MS 114, and that Latin texts were more

acceptable then than later in the fifteenth century. Instead, the movement was able to use works they found influential in their devotion.

At the time this manuscript was compiled, it was, then, too early for sister books to have been written, and while MS 114 is definitely not a sister book we can see the trend of *devotio moderna* using individuals as obedient examples. Medieval texts written about men were far more common in the fifteenth century than texts written about women. The entirety of the manuscript hosts two female characters: Bridget and Mary Magdalene. Yet even in the *homily* Mary Magdalene's story is narrated by a male preacher. This homily is a perfect summation of the entire manuscript, as MS 114, really, is a manuscript about a worthy woman, whose obedience other women should follow, narrated by the male-religious.

Comparisons between St Bridget of Sweden and the ideals of the *devotio moderna* movement are not unknown but there has not been a discussion of Bridget's potential influence on the movement and its success. MS 114 provides a direct connection between *devotio moderna* and Bridget. The manuscript's use of Bridget as an example is similar to *devotio moderna*'s later use of their former sisters for sister books. While Bridget was not a member of *devotio moderna*, and likely never came into contact with *devotio moderna*, her reputation circulated around religious circles throughout Europe.

At the time of compilation, early in *devotio moderna*'s inception, there were not sufficient actual *devotio moderna* works to warrant an entire manuscript. Instead, MS 114 became a manuscript compiled of devotional works known to influence the movement, and it uses the focus of a central character, Bridget, who could be their obedient exempla in the same way that later *devotio moderna* sister books would use their own sisters' *viten* as examples of obedience. This trend of using obedient women

as an exemplar began then before they had the sisters to fill the role. At the time MS 114 was compiled, in the early fifteenth century, Bridget becomes their female exemplar.

The final two chapters of this thesis will use the history of *devotio moderna*, compiled in the previous chapter, and anecdotes contained within MS 114 to consider how obedience and chastity are depicted within the manuscript and particularly within the pseudo- sister book which is the Life of St Bridget. Firstly, there will be a discussion of gender and chastity. *Devotio moderna* was not a movement which expected or encouraged formal vows of chastity, but they did encourage chaste living. Bridget's *vita* demonstrates how chastity could be achieved by the wife as well as the maid or the widow. Her gendering, however, created challenges for other reasons. The chapter will consider the tensions between Bridget as a female mystic and an authoritative spiritual speaker. The juxtaposition of the attempt to describe Bridget in ways which could masculinise or neutralise her gender were at war with *devotio moderna*'s need for a clearly female example for their sisters to imitate. Secondly, the role of obedience, the core value of the movement, will be discussed in an exploration of silence and the female voice. As discussed earlier, every article within MS 114 was male-authored, and this factor gives a male-authority to any female voice depicted within the manuscript. Bridget, in opposition to what is depicted in her revelations, appears demure and silent throughout the manuscript. Whereas Mary Magdalene's story is narrated through a man's voice who witnesses the scene of Christ's resurrection. The manuscript does not directly compare Mary Magdalene and Bridget, but both women represent a lay-religious life style as well as an understanding of obedience.

Chapter Three

A Praiseworthy State: Chastity and St Bridget in MS 114

Introduction

Lincoln Cathedral MS 114 was shown in the previous chapter to be a probable production of the *devotio moderna* movement of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. It contains a sermon popular amongst devotees of the movement given by Gerard Grote, credited as founder of *devotio moderna* as well as texts emphasising the virtues its adherents thought of as ideal: chastity, obedience, and humility but exercised by the laity. These monastic ideals were upheld by the movements' communities and members without the taking of formal vows. Within this manuscript, dating from early within the movement's history, we have seen that a particular emphasis is placed upon St Bridget of Sweden as an example of a virtuous lived life. This use of a paradigm of obedience was later modified for *devotio moderna* sister books; where deceased *devotio moderna* holy women were then used to act as models.

The next two chapters will demonstrate how Bridget was used in this manuscript to provide a twofold example: firstly, as a pattern of chaste behaviour; and secondly, as a model of obedience. As a married woman and a saint, Bridget was an ideal choice for advertising a holy way of life to women at all life stages. However, her role as religious leader led some of her supporters to present her in ways which challenged views of her gender identity. The articles contained within MS 114 were created by men; this was common in early *devotio moderna* manuscripts, but differentiates MS 114 from the later *devotio moderna* sister books which were written

not only for, but by, women.³⁸⁶ This chapter will examine the manuscript's earlier portrayal of Bridget's gender identity, in which she was either masculinized in an effort to justify her sanctity or her female gender was neutralized.³⁸⁷ The chapter will then, through its examination of Bridget's life as a maiden, wife, and widow, consider the presentation of Bridget, despite attempts to manipulate her gender, as a very female example in the context of the manuscript. In doing so, this chapter will consider articles contained within the manuscript which defend Bridget, partially through a re-presentation of her gender. It will, however, focus principally on Bridget's *vita* which contains personal anecdotes of Bridget's behaviour throughout her life. The placement of Bridget's *vita* at the heart of MS 114 is strategic. The *vita* is deliberately preceded by articles which defend the reputation of Bridget, by asserting that her spirituality is legitimate. The *vita* is then followed by extracts from theological works echoing and reinforcing devotional ideas presented in earlier articles. Because of the particular composition of the manuscript, the reading and examination of the manuscript's articles will be done within the context of the

³⁸⁶ The following is a select, although by no means exhaustive, list of literature on late medieval sister books: Mathilde van Dijk, "'The Pearl Lay Hidden in the Dung' Reaching for God in *Devotio Moderna* Sister books' in *Common Bodies: Everyday Practices, Gender and Religion*, ed. Maaïke de Heerdt and Anne-Marie Korte, (Münster: Lit, 2002), 43-58; Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth Century Germany*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996); Wybren Scheepersma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim, and Their Writings*, transl. by David F. Johnson, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004); Thérèse de Hemptinne, 'Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550)' in *The Voices of Silence: Women's Literacy in a Men's Church*, eds Thérèse de Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 111-126; Mathilde van Dijk, 'Miracles and Visions in *Devotio Moderna* Biographies' in *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church*, eds Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 239-248; Mathilde van Dijk, 'Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen' in *Mulieris Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early modern Periods* eds Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 243-264.

³⁸⁷ This chapter will discuss issues of both gender and sexuality, in doing so it will assume the common understandings of gender (being understood as cultural performative) and sex (being understood as biological). These topics are discussed in a multitude of literature; however, Monica H. Green explicitly discusses the two concepts and the line between the two, see: Monica H. Green, 'Caring for Gendered Bodies' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 345-361.

manuscript as a whole. In this way, reading the manuscript will show how the use of themes within the manuscript were integrated rather than a random composition.

Bridget's *vita* provides the clearest comparison with *devotio moderna's* sister books, as it gives an account of Bridget's life in such a way as to make it a useful model for female members of *devotio moderna*: women living non-cloistered lives as maidens, mothers and widows. The *vita* clearly defines Bridget's three life stages: virginity, marriage, and widowhood. it presents her as a practical example of the woman who displays chastity, a state pleasing to God, at all stages of her life, in her virginity before marriage, in her pious and disciplined approach to marriage itself, and finally in her widowhood where she was able to embrace the status of the Bride of Christ.

The lifelong maintenance of virginity was a female ideal which was encouraged and praised, and exemplified by a number of female saints presented as models to medieval Christian women.³⁸⁸ This focus on virginity was a long term Christian emphasis. St Paul, the Apostle, held harsh views on ideas of sex and gender hierarchy: his Biblical letters drew parallels between the inferiority of the wife to her husband and the inferiority of the flesh to the spirit.³⁸⁹ Later, this was expanded upon in the work of the early Christian fathers who attempted to draw a correlation between sexuality and sin. Their fear and anxiety over the two led them to negative views of sex. In actuality, however, a virgin lifestyle was not a realistic goal for everyone; especially not for women as their sexual status was governed less by themselves and

³⁸⁸ An example of texts grouped together, encouraging female virginity, is the thirteenth century, Middle English, Katherine Group. Addressed to anchoresses, it praised the virtue of virginity with the inclusion of the *vitae* of Katherine of Alexandria, Margaret of Antioch, and Julian of Niocomedea. These texts currently exist in: Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Bodley 34 and British Library, ms Royal 17 A VII. Sarah Salih's chapter on performing virginity discusses these virgin martyrs: Sarah Salih, 'Performing Virginites: The Katherine Group' in *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 42-106.

³⁸⁹ JoAnn McNamara, 'Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Tradition', *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976), 146.

more by the men in their life.³⁹⁰ Society's obsession with a woman's virginal life had ebbed slightly by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, yet the anxiety over where exactly the line should be drawn that divided spiritual safety from danger in terms of a woman's sexual activities, would continue.³⁹¹ The *devotio moderna* movement, drawing female adherents from all stages of the life cycle, could not afford to place too great an emphasis on a link between virginity and piety. Its members included wives and widows. Rather, the movement encouraged chastity in different ways, with emphasis placed on the chaste periods of a woman's life and about control of sexual behaviour rather than upon a lifetime of chastity. In the *vita* included in MS 114, Bridget is shown practicing this form of chastity by living chastely with her husband at the very beginning of their marriage and at the end of their marriage when she was no longer of child bearing age.

Bridget and Gender

The sexuality and gender of pious medieval men and women, regardless of whether they were dead or living saints, was a difficult issue. The binary division into male and female was not always the most useful categorisation in explorations or justifications of religious authority. We can set aside Foucault's argument that medieval men and women had no gender identities: scholars have established clearly there were concepts of masculine and feminine in theological, philosophical and medical terms across the medieval period.³⁹² Medical and philosophical views about

³⁹⁰ For the idea of the 'maintenance of virginity' being an unattainable ideal, see: McGlynn and Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: "It were to hire a greet merite"", 103-122, especially 104.

³⁹¹ Ideology on marriage and sex had become more lenient when theological trend lent more favour to Augustine's more moderate views on the subject as opposed to Jerome's. Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll, 'Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: "It were to hire a greet merite"' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1996), 110.

³⁹² For Foucault's famous work on sexuality, see: Michel Foucault, *Historie de la sexualite* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), transl. as *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, transl. Robert Hurley

the essential nature of medieval men and women did not always, however, match with their presentation in religious life. Heat and hairiness, for instance, represented masculine traits of virility and power: yet as Jacqueline Murray points out, the monk shaved his head and holy women used steam baths as a form of self-punishment.³⁹³ Bernard of Clairvaux, in the twelfth century, encouraged the cult of the Virgin Mary and developed an image of Christ himself as a nurturing mother, overseeing and protecting the monks of Bernard's Cistercian order. Bernard was noted for the deliberately masculine tones of his writing, yet he too saw himself, as abbot, as mother to his community.³⁹⁴ Thus holy men feminised the male and holy women masculinised themselves.

The gender of the day – to – day interpreter and conveyer of spirituality, the priest, has also been considered to have been fluid and problematic: officially barred from marriage and procreation, and from acts of violence which could define masculinity in a world where knighthoods and family lineage were important, they could find themselves to be almost a 'third sex'.³⁹⁵ It has further been suggested that clerical manhood itself could be viewed as deficient or effeminate.³⁹⁶ Martyrdom too,

(New York: Vintage Books, 1990). Several scholars have discussed Foucault and medieval sexuality, including but not limited to: Monica Green, 'Female Sexuality in the Medieval West' *Trends in History* 4 (1990) 129-35; Nancy F. Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender' *Speculum* 68 (1993) 419-443; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7-8; Karma Lochrie 'Desiring Foucault' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997), 3-16; Vern L. Bullough, *Sex, Society, and History* (New York: Science History Publications, 1976).

³⁹³ Jacqueline Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?' in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 44-5.

³⁹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 115.

³⁹⁵ This issue is discussed by both P.H. Cullum and R.N. Swanson. Cullum discusses the issue of clerical masculinity and, as she describes, the practical implications, whereas Swanson looks at the theoretical and theological conceptions of gender identity within the clergy. See: R.N. Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation' in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* eds D.M. Hadley, (London: Routledge, 1999), 160-77; P.H. Cullum, 'Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England' in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, eds D.M. Hadley, (London: Routledge, 1999), 170-196.

³⁹⁶ Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, 'Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy' *Gender & History* 18 (2006), 384.

as Murray points out, could become a point of what she describes as ‘gender slippage’, where the one flesh through which all of mankind was said to be in Christ became undifferentiated, neither male nor female.³⁹⁷ This ‘gender slippage’ around set gender boundaries affected all aspects of religious gender assumptions; affecting both lay and vowed religious. The masculinisation of women-religious was a necessary tactic in order to set them apart from other women. Likewise, the feminization of religious men set them on a level deemed closer to Christ. It is the nature of these masculinities and femininities – in relation to each other – which provides a more complete context in which to study gender and society.

In this context, criticisms of holy women for their possession of masculine attributes led their supporters to interpret their actions, and to represent them, in ways that neutralised or set aside the issue of gender. This gender neutrality which has been seen as a challenge for the religious man could be used to the advantage of the pious woman. Such a representation of Bridget takes place in the pieces which precede the *vita* in MS 114, particularly in those by Adam Easton, Mathais of Linköping and Alfonso of Jaén.³⁹⁸ These articles consider, and attempt to address or set aside, the anxieties which arose from Bridget’s reputation as an outspoken woman and in particular from her reception and publication of Revelations which she claimed as divine and which contained political as well as social comment.³⁹⁹ The authors of these texts, Adam Easton, Mathias, and Alfonso, are concerned not with Bridget’s marital status, but rather with her being a woman, and with the dangers which were associated with the female sex. Their authors work to depict the saint as a humble and

³⁹⁷ Jacqueline Murray, ‘One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?’ in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 42-50.

³⁹⁸ Details of these articles are discussed in chapter two of this thesis, as well as in Table A of chapter two.

³⁹⁹ For more on the revelations as Bridget’s ‘voice’ see chapter four, below.

obedient woman, who despite being female, nevertheless gained Christ's favour.

These Birgittine authors were concerned with Bridget being a woman, and their treatment reflects contemporary social anxieties associated with the female sex. For these authors, this anxiety was the hurdle they needed to overcome in order to depict Bridget as a legitimate and appropriate exemplum of female piety.

In Article 6 of the manuscript, Cardinal Adam Easton addresses this issue in particular when he states that Bridget 'presents her sex as suitable for and relevant to her vocation as mediator of divine revelations.'⁴⁰⁰ A woman's physical body carried with it many potential dangers, he knew. Her sexuality, and her inherently sinful nature, were also both dangerous. Both Bridget's *vita* and her revelations make reference to the danger of men having sordid thoughts brought up because of the mere existence of the female form. In the *vita*'s passage 'How the prayer of the bride of god was of profit to someone' and the revelation 'A Devil Tempts a Friar; In the Explanation a Witch Tempts a Priest' the same tale is recounted of a priest who comes to Bridget after being tormented by such sordid thoughts for twelve years.⁴⁰¹ These passages retell the struggles of a priest who, whilst bound by his vow of celibacy, battled his own sexual desires and thoughts. The recounting in the revelations expands what is given in the *vita*: according to the revelation, a witch was responsible for casting a spell of carnal impurity on the priest. While communing with the spirit about how to help the priest, an angel explains that it was the woman's fault for placing the evil, carnal, spell on the priest: 'Know that this woman has these three

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted in Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 183.

⁴⁰¹ Both accounts seem to be concerning the same tortured priest. The description in the revelations contains more description than the brief anecdote of the *vita*. MS 114 fo.59v-b; *Revelations Book VI* 3.

evil properties: infidelity, obduracy, and the desire for money and carnal pleasure.’⁴⁰²

In this story, the witch, woman, and the devil are all the same creature who plague the priest with these sordid thoughts.⁴⁰³ Because of this, the figure of the woman is not only a witch (in itself a dangerous entity) but also the devil with the ability to afflict even a holy man with sexual thoughts. Furthermore, it directly connects women with the evils of sexual desires.

Ideas of failed female obedience also often centred around issues of a woman’s sexuality and her physical body.⁴⁰⁴ A woman’s physical body was viewed as the physical representation of her inferiority, which necessitated her subordination to men.⁴⁰⁵ Although inferior, the female body was central in determining her perceived grace.⁴⁰⁶ The female body’s constant association with the flesh, and therefore lust, was often embraced as expressing her utmost inferiority as well as being a source of

⁴⁰² Here, it is the ‘desire’ which is counted as the third evil property; this interpretation of lust is used for a desire of both monetary and carnal desire and is therefore grouped as one evil. *Revelations*, Book VI 3.

⁴⁰³ In Mathias’ *Prologue*, Article 2 of MS 114 and originally the prologue to Bridget’s collected revelations, Mathias lists the three sins of the devil as: pride, greed and lust. Which seem to align with this depiction of the devil/woman in this passage. MS 114, fo. 7rb.

⁴⁰⁴ The topic of medieval women and the body is extremely complex and deserves lengthier coverage than can be given within the confines of this thesis. The following works are but a small collection of literature which discusses the complexity of the subject of the female body, this collection comprises texts which are deemed classical scholarship as well as more recent texts and are representative of several different facets of the subject of the medieval female body: Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Monica H. Green, ‘Caring for Gendered Bodies’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 345-361; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2012); Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, eds, *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

⁴⁰⁵ Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, ‘Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology’ in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 218.

⁴⁰⁶ Dyan Elliott discusses the issue of gender within Christianity, see: Dyan Elliott, ‘Gender and the Christian Traditions’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2013), 31.

temptation for men. The frail nature of the female body, weak in comparison to the masculine strength of a man's, was corruptible and therefore raised both a spiritual and social concern.⁴⁰⁷ But, as Dyan Elliott notes, this same doorway which allowed for intimacy with the devil also allowed intimacy with Christ.⁴⁰⁸ Between the high and later middle ages, a new devotional focus on the Passion of Christ, and his humanity, placed a significant emphasis on the body – male or female – as a source of spiritual salvation.⁴⁰⁹

In this way, despite associations with weakness and inferiority, the woman's body became a source for physical spirituality. Fasting, for example, was an exertion which, physically, affected the body yet was also a symbolic portrayal of female spirituality.⁴¹⁰ This form of physical spirituality created a legitimate avenue for women to express their obedience to God and also to embrace their body, by exploring its spiritual potential.⁴¹¹ Furthermore, the physicality of their spirituality and their association with the broken body – for example, a body which suffered whilst fasting – linked with the suffering Christ's human body experienced through

⁴⁰⁷Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: An analysis of the concept of pollution and taboo*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 6; Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Penn Press, 1999) 1; Dyan Elliott, 'Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body' in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100-1500* eds Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 13.

⁴⁰⁸Dyan Elliott, 'Gender and the Christian Tradition', 31-2.

⁴⁰⁹Dyan Elliott, 'Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body' in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100-1500*, eds Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 13.

⁴¹⁰ While fasting is a form of spirituality, it is also a form of regulating control over the body. Ton Brandenburg has discussed this topic in relation to St Anne and the inspiration later saints gained from her example, see: Ton Brandenburg, 'St Anne: A Holy Grandmother and her Children' in *Sanctity and Motherhood* edited by Anneke B. Mulder Bakker, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 1; Ton Brandenburg, 'St Anne and Her Family: The Veneration of St Anne in Connection with Concepts of Marriage and the Family in the Early Modern Period', in *Saints and She-Devils: Images of Women in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Lene Dresden-Coenders, (Alberta, Canada: The Rubicon Press, 1987), 59-82.

⁴¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum makes this argument, physical spirituality allowed women to embrace their body, which often was understood solely as an inferiority, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, "'And Woman His Humanity": Female imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages,' in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 171-89.

Crucifixion.⁴¹² Late medieval women, in particular, identified with the humanity of Christ and his physical, yet holy, flesh.⁴¹³ These contradictions amongst religious ideologies – weak corruptible flesh with spiritual potential – made it difficult to determine what was female obedience and what were female inadequacies. Bridget's *vita* does not dwell on female inadequacies, but rather demonstrates how Bridget's obedience allows her to overcome any inherent frailties.

For women, the manifestations and ideas of the 'body' are relevant when discussing concepts of female gender. Bridget's own body is largely ignored throughout MS 114, and emphasis is put on her spiritual experiences rather than her bodily experiences. Nevertheless, when the body is discussed, even in abstraction, it has a negative connotation. Bridget's *vita* takes this to extremes when it presents the devil himself as having a physical body although one of impossible horror and inhuman appearance: he was 'as if having a hundred hands and feet and deformed in every way'.⁴¹⁴ This physical manifestation of the devil's deformed body linked the idea of the physical body itself with sinful monstrosities. It provided a warning for the *vita*'s readers about the body's role in the perils of sinful behaviour, a symbolism which was not unique to the texts in MS 114. In a more deliberately human form, with greater immediate relevance to medieval men and women, the seven deadly sins were often represented as physical beings, giving further credence to the idea that the physical body was as a serious subject and worthy of fear. Amongst these sins, lust in

⁴¹² Dyan Elliott, 'Gender and the Christian Tradition', 31-2.

⁴¹³ In two of her celebrated volumes, Caroline Walker Bynum demonstrates how female spirituality grew to celebrate the body's spiritual potential, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

⁴¹⁴ MS 114, fo. 55v-b. Original Latin transcription : 'vidit dyabalum cum quasi habentem centum manus et pedes et in omnibus deformissimum'.

particular was usually cast as female, a further tangible reminder of the danger of the female form to the virtue of chastity.

Along similar lines, concerns over the female, physical, body manifested as further apprehensions over female sexuality and its potential to corrupt.⁴¹⁵ Female sexuality was understood as an uncontrollable force, with concerns raised about the woman's inability to control her own sexuality.⁴¹⁶ The unpredictable, and uncontrollable, nature of female sexuality sanctioned the need to emphasise the practice of control. Because of this chastity, like fasting, was considered a way to practice control of the body, in this case in order to control potential dangers of sexuality.⁴¹⁷

The later Middle Ages would continue to classify and group women in accordance with their sexual status, with virgins maintaining a privileged status. Marriage – the likely future for most medieval women – came with several biological consequences which affected their sexual status: loss of virginity, and pregnancy and the bearing of children.⁴¹⁸ These experiences, including the breaking of hymen and the woman's loss of virginity, were thought to be painful and physical reminders that women were daughters of Eve and shared the burden of Eve's disobedience.⁴¹⁹ The fall further signified humanity's – particularly female humanity's – inability to control its own

⁴¹⁵ D.A. Fein, 'The Dangerous Sex: Representations of the Female Body in Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles' *Department of Romance Languages* 39.2 (1999), 196.

⁴¹⁶ D.A. Fein, 'The Dangerous Sex: Representations of the Female Body in Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles' *Department of Romance Languages* 39.2 (1999), 196-7.

⁴¹⁷ Both the canonists Tancred (d. 1112) and Innocent IV (d. 1254) discuss the necessity of the monitoring a woman's behaviour to control her desires. Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 157n12; Peter Brown, *The body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (Ithaca, Columbia University Press, 1988), 356; James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 350-1, 427.

⁴¹⁸ Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, 'Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology' in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 223.

⁴¹⁹ Ruth Evans, 'What was Sexuality in the Middle Ages?' in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Middle Ages Vol. 2* ed. Ruth Evans, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.

desire for pleasure or to avoid the sin of lust.⁴²⁰ Just – or perhaps more – alarming than the sin of lust itself, was the risk that the curiosity of lust would transform into a more frequent habit.⁴²¹

In MS 114, the articles considering Bridget include examinations of the female role in lust. In the manuscript's second article, Bridget's Swedish confessor, the theologian Mathias of Linköping, states that '*cupiditas*', or lust, is enough alone to bring about eternal death.⁴²² Later in the same piece, Mathias lists lust as one of the devil's three sins along with pride and greed.⁴²³ The idea of lust as toxic was a common fear amongst medieval Christians. Although he was writing in the fourteenth century, Mathias, like many medieval theologians, took his thoughts about sexuality from the early Christian fathers.⁴²⁴ They all, to varying degrees, emphasized the consequences which arose from lust. Jerome preached that lust was responsible for the fall of man.⁴²⁵ Augustine felt uncontrollable lust was a leftover reaction to Adam's sin at the Fall, although he associated the sin with the male erection than with a woman's sexuality.⁴²⁶ In many ways, early theologians used the fall to characterize the loss of ability to control one's own will. Furthermore, the inability to control one's

⁴²⁰ Church father Jerome, credited the fall of mankind to feelings of lust, see: Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 303-334; Ton Brandenbarg, "St Anne: A Holy Grandmother and her children" in *Sanctity and Motherhood* ed. Anneke B. Mulder Bakker (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 48; Joni Hand, *Women, Manuscripts and Identity in Northern Europe, 1350-1550* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 221.

⁴²¹ Shawn Madison Krahmer, 'Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux' *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37.1 (2002), 7.

⁴²² MS 114, fo. 6r-a.

⁴²³ MS 114, fo. 7r-b.

⁴²⁴ On Matthias of Linköping, see: Bridget Morris, *St Brigitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 69-72.; Bengt Strömberg, 'Magister Mathias' ställning till tidens heretiska strömningar'. *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 19 (1943), 301-22; Bengt Strömberg, *Magister Mathias och franska mendikantpredikan* (Samlingar och studier till Svenska kyrkans historia 9. Stockholm, 1944); Anders Piltz, *Prolegomena till en textkritisk edition av magister Mathias' Homo Conditus* (Uppsala: 1974).

⁴²⁵ Ton Brandenbarg, 'St Anne: A Holy Grandmother and her Children' in *Sanctity and Motherhood* ed. Anneke B. Mulder Bakker, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 48; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 303-334.

⁴²⁶ Monica Green, 'Female Sexuality in the Medieval West' *Trends in History* 4 (1990), 135; Joyce E. Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), 87-8.

actions were supplemental consequences of evils of lust.⁴²⁷ Thus, the fall came to represent not just the sin of disobedience but a range of sins, including lust which was initially brought to the world by female sexuality.⁴²⁸

It was necessary, therefore, to remove Bridget from the sphere of threatening, physical womanhood and to justify the apparently masculine ways in which she acted in her presentation of her revelations. Thus, Alfonso of Jaén, who came from the Iberian Peninsula and was Bridget's last confessor, depicts her, in his *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges*, as a visionary. This text, also found within MS 114, was a defence of Bridget's credibility, in which Alfonso was careful not to over-emphasise her 'femaleness': a trait which could have been a threat to potential future canonization; a process which when Alfonso was writing was still to come.⁴²⁹ In the *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges* Alfonso took care to ensure that Bridget was not depicted with too many of the typical female traits lest these should bring further, unwanted attention to what could be, and were elsewhere, described as her female handicaps. Alfonso needed to ensure that Bridget would not be depicted as too dominating a character because to do so would present her as too masculine. This factor was of particular importance, as Bridget's revelations (also edited by Alfonso) which lay her open to charges of masculine behaviour were to be used as evidence for her canonization, and would be under the scrutiny of the various elite circles of the papacy.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ Joni Hand. *Women, Manuscripts and Identity in Northern Europe, 1350-1550*, (New York: Ashgate, 2013), 221.

⁴²⁸ For a discussion of the progression from curiosity to lust to habit, see: Shawn Madison Krahmer, 'Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the Works of Bernard of Clairvaux' *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37 (2002), 3-13, especially 6-7.

⁴²⁹ The *Epistola* is also proof of how Alfonso's theological knowledge and sophistication supported Bridget, see: Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), 79-80.

⁴³⁰ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 78. To read about the canonization process of Bridget, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 144-159.

Although Bridget had many supporters both before and after her death, she also had her fair share of detractors; detractors who tried for decades to have initial approval of her canonization overturned, claiming that God would never have given such a gift to a woman. In order to ensure that Bridget's depiction and reputation, as a strong woman with spiritual revelations, her supporters tried not to give detractors any more evidence to support efforts to discredit Bridget. Concerned that appearances could undermine perceptions of Bridget's authenticity as a saint, Alfonso knew that the image of Bridget needed to conform to certain standards and expectations.

In her book *God's Words, Women's Voices*, Rosalyn Voaden explored how Alfonso developed a positive image of Bridget with *discretio spirituum*, or the discernment of spirits.⁴³¹ By constructing Bridget in terms that permitted her to operate within the public sphere, the piece spiritually empowered her allowing her behaviour to be presented as manifesting obedience to God. The discernment of spirits defined the medieval visionary experience. It decreed the virtue of the visionary, and established forms of expression as well as laying down the criteria for assessment and acceptability of visions and pronouncements by the Church.⁴³² Although, in theory, discerning spirits needed to be considered by both male and female visionaries, the social apprehensions which accompanied female spirituality meant that *discretio spirituum* affected women more than men – or, at least, was presented as doing so.⁴³³ The discernment of spirits acted as a defence against false

⁴³¹ See: Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*.

⁴³² For an explanation on the biblical passages which influenced discerning spirits, see: Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3-4.

⁴³³ During the late-fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Jean Gerson (d.1429) attempted to use the discernment of spirits as a way to produce a procedural and juridical response to female prophecy. For Gerson, he saw women as more prone to error than men, and therefore deserving of more controlled-attention. Gerson specifically applied this to his texts on Joan of Arc, see: Dyan Elliott, 'Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 38.

prophets who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ.⁴³⁴ Discerning a legitimate spiritual experience acted as a test to expunge these falsities: 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.'⁴³⁵ Arising from a fear of deception by such spirits, female prophecy and female mystics were often challenged in terms of this discernment of spirits. Furthermore, and significant to the context of this thesis, the existence of a standard against which female mysticism was assessed meant that there was an approved method for containing and controlling female spirituality.⁴³⁶ It was this attempt to control and contain unpredictable female mysticism that we see in Alfonso of Jaén's texts within MS 114. Voaden's larger argument discusses Alfonso's use of discernment of spirits in constructing Bridget's identity; both social and textual.

Alfonso carefully constructed Bridget the saint within the discourse of the discernment of spirits so that her work could receive a more positive reception than it might otherwise have done.⁴³⁷ For example, Alfonso censored Bridget's revelations in response to social apprehensions surrounding the unpredictable nature of female prophecy. This censorship and manipulation of terminology was carefully balanced.⁴³⁸ It created a picture of Bridget which he understood would allow her to be accepted as conforming to these restrictions that were so very important in constructing a female religious icon. This conformity within certain restricted

⁴³⁴ There was a further fear that it a false mystic was actually Satan in disguise, see: 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

⁴³⁵ This acted as an instruction to test spirits in order to determine whether they were genuinely of God. 1 John 4:11

⁴³⁶ Dyan Elliott, 'Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 28.

⁴³⁷ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* 79.

⁴³⁸ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* 89.

parameters was what really empowered Bridget as a holy icon, despite her sexual history.⁴³⁹

Alfonso's construction of Bridget's identity particularly involved his addressing her womanhood.⁴⁴⁰ Alfonso understands the fine line that must be balanced between depicting Bridget as feminine enough to appear unthreatening to the male sex yet not so feminine that the weakness of her sex overshadows her spirituality. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that 'medieval thinkers used gender imagery fluidly, not literally.'⁴⁴¹ Alfonso's constructions of Bridget and her womanhood show how the gender of medieval holy figures could also be flexible.⁴⁴² He used the advantages of Bridget's womanhood, her wifely and motherly experiences to place her within an already established tradition of holy women in similar situations.⁴⁴³ However, when it came to representing her knowledge, Alfonso

⁴³⁹ This is truly Alfonso's contribution to the partnership. Making sure that Bridget adhered to these restrictions, therefore leading to her empowerment. Furthermore, it gives Alfonso two different responsibilities: 'that of grammarian and that of guardian of religious truth.' Kimberly M. Benedict, *Empowering Collaborations: Writing Partnerships between Religious Women and Scribes in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36; Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* 79.

⁴⁴⁰ Voaden discusses, specifically, Alfonso's construction of Bridget's womanhood, however Sarah Salih has discussed the construction of womanhood with regards to social and cultural identities in the, fourteenth century, Middle English conduct poem 'How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter'. Here, Salih notes how every specification of the conduct of the woman is significant: 'dress, gesture, speech, and place all embody the discipline of which the individual is both subject and performer.' Sarah Salih, 'At home; out of the house' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)135-6; Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* 89.

⁴⁴¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 218.

⁴⁴² Although not discussing Bridget and Alfonso specifically, Tricia A. Lootens discusses the concept of gendering holy figures, saying: '...it might be easier to masculinise a female saint than to challenge the direct correspondence between virtue and virility.' Although Lootens' monograph largely focuses on Victorian era sanctity, she also uses the later middle ages as precedent for later Victorian canonizations. See: Tricia A. Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 47.

⁴⁴³ Jennifer Carpenter has argued that women in the later Middle Ages actually benefited from shifting societal trends which allowed mothers to become recognized as holy figures, as there was value placed on the children of saintly mothers. However, a differentiation between Bridget and earlier Christian mothers, was that holy mothers were often mothers of saintly sons: St Helena mother of Constantine, St Monica mother of St Augustine, St Aleth mother of Bernard of Clairvaux and St Joan of Aza mother of St Dominic. While Bridget was always depicted as an exquisite mother, it was her daughter Catherine (later St Catherine of Sweden) who was often praised in connection with her holy mother. Nonetheless, Bridget's motherhood was an important part of her holy womanhood. Jennifer Carpenter, 'Juette of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158-1228): Children and Mothering in the Saintly Life' in *Power of the*

masculinizes her – he implies that her visions are more intellectual than they are sensual.⁴⁴⁴ Alfonso tries to minimize this without risking depicting her as all but a man, by which he would have lost the advantages of her sex. He showed how Bridget could transcend her own sex and he does this by eliminating much of her personality.⁴⁴⁵ By primarily using biblical metaphors and imagery, Alfonso asks the reader to believe that the revelations were written on Bridget's heart by God's finger.⁴⁴⁶

Alfonso chooses to focus on two different aspects of Bridget's behaviour. First is her submission to her spiritual directors, so firmly placing her under the authority of men and reminding the reader of her inferiority and submission to men.⁴⁴⁷ The second is her behaviour while in ecstasy. Here instead of focusing on the physical climax of the moment, Alfonso describes it an ecstasy of the heart aligning it with the spiritual rather than physical body. The physicality of the 'moment' is lost and instead becomes more a moment of intense spiritual knowledge stemming from the heart.⁴⁴⁸ Alfonso's purpose in depicting Bridget in this way was to show how Bridget can transcend her own female sex. By doing so, as Rosalyn Voaden points out, Alfonso removes Bridget's personality and instead presents her as a metaphorical empty vessel, which is then filled with the words of God.⁴⁴⁹ Bridget becomes a depiction of mind and spirit, and the aspect of her body is subtracted from the given description.

Weak: Studies on Medieval Women, eds Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 58-9; Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 89.

⁴⁴⁴ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 89.

⁴⁴⁵ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 89.

⁴⁴⁶ Samuel Fanous, 'Becoming the Theotokos: Birgitta of Sweden and Fulfilment of Salvation History' in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400*, eds Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (New York: Ashgate, 2011), 256.

⁴⁴⁷ A majority of the *Epistola* is devoted to her submission to the guidance of her spiritual supervisors.

⁴⁴⁸ It is the manner in which Bridget receives her visions that is important. Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 80.

⁴⁴⁹ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 89.

In a sense, Alfonso creates Bridget as a genderless figure who is without the threat of being too intelligent or outspoken and thus being seen as too masculine. For example, Alfonso takes great care not to elevate her above men but also makes sure she is freed from the negative handicap of being a woman. He also takes this presentation a step further and makes Bridget an exemplar for the criteria of the discernment of spirits. He sets Bridget amongst a series of traditional biblical women who were known for their own spirituality and used this as proof for Bridget's own virtue.

Bridget then could be, and was, placed outside the experience of everyday medieval 'femaleness'. She was a saint, a conduit of God's power, and an example of extreme piety. As a pious woman, she should have presented an ideal example of medieval womanhood, yet as a saint she was also placed within an ungendered context which could be seen to make her less accessible as a pattern to follow. The next section explores how MS 114 is focused on Bridget, in the process constructing her as a pattern for other women within the *devotio moderna* movement.

'Virginity, Marriage, and Widowhood are All Praiseworthy States'

The challenge to Bridget's suitability as a model of pious womanhood was she presented as a woman; a woman with whom the fourteenth and fifteenth century wife, mother, widow or youth could identify? Throughout MS 114, Bridget was represented as accessible to ordinary women, both through a further knowledge of Bridget's own writings, particularly her Revelations, and in the presentation of Bridget's own *vita* in MS 114. In examining how this *vita* presents the stages of Bridget's life, it is important to consider how Bridget addresses the topic of the female life in her revelations, a publication which was well known throughout Europe at the time that

MS 114 was being compiled (early fifteenth century) and whose contents may therefore have been known in part by the manuscript's hearers as well as its compilers.⁴⁵⁰

In comparison to the articles of MS 114 explored earlier in this chapter, the revelations give a more intimate immediate view of Bridget and provide the valuable perspective of a lay-religious woman living through key events in the fourteenth century.⁴⁵¹ It is important to note, therefore, that in one of these revelations, Christ, speaking through Bridget, is clear that perpetual virginity is not the only way of life acceptable to God. Christ discusses the idea of praiseworthy life-states in connection to both men and women, declaring, 'The common and praiseworthy state in life is acceptable to me.'⁴⁵² The 'common' state to which Christ is referring is the state of marriage. Receiving this revelation as a widow, Bridget was concerned about how her previous marital state affected her merit. Christ reminds Bridget that both Moses and Peter were married, and yet were still pleasing to him.⁴⁵³ Christ reassures Bridget that one must, 'rise from the lower to that which is more perfect.'⁴⁵⁴ Christ thus recognises that virginity is not a path required of everyone, but that despite their 'carnal mind[s]' men and women who marry can later achieve spirituality through chastity, as the Biblical Judith also does during her widowhood.⁴⁵⁵ This particular revelation gives attention to the chastity of both men and women, but in many of Bridget's revelations, and certainly in MS 114, the concern is largely directed at the chastity of women.

⁴⁵⁰ This is further discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, in particular see Table A.

⁴⁵¹ Nieuwland, 'Birgitta's View of Marriage: Theory Versus Practice', 83.

⁴⁵² *Revelations*, VI 119.

⁴⁵³ In her notes for the revelations, Morris notes the association with Ecclesiasticus 45:1 and I Corinthians 9:5 for the references to Moses and Peter, see: *Revelations*, VI 119, n. 1 & 2.

⁴⁵⁴ *Revelations*, VI 119.

⁴⁵⁵ *Revelations*, VI 119.

It is clear that Bridget was not against marriage because in her revelations she expresses a certain realism in discussing marriage, exhibiting an awareness of the practicality of marriage as a means of containing sexual desire.⁴⁵⁶ The revelations act as a reassurance to her, and later others, that the marital state is not displeasing to Christ, instead there are more important virtues to possess. Obedience and humility were thus presented as more important virtues than sexual status.⁴⁵⁷ Obedience is ‘virtue by which everything that is imperfect becomes perfect, and all defects are overcome.’⁴⁵⁸ In the revelations, Bridget adopts an approach, similar in fact to that of St Augustine (although it is not clear that she would have directly known his work), of praising virginity without slandering marriage.⁴⁵⁹ Her revelations also demonstrate a certain amount of realism concerning sex, particularly regarding its necessity for the purpose of procreation.⁴⁶⁰ Elsewhere, God explains to Bridget how Adam and Eve, and presumably generations to follow, would have had children if they had not been subject to original sin: ‘Love's blood would have sown its seed in the woman's body without any shameful lust, through divine love and mutual affection and sexual intercourse in which they both would have been set on fire for each other, and the woman would thus have become fertile.’⁴⁶¹ With God’s explanation, Bridget understands that it is lust which is shameful, whereas procreation itself was intended

⁴⁵⁶ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 43; See the following in *Revelations*: Book I 26, 40, 59; Book IV 7, 25, 82, 83, 84; Book VI 13; Book VII 31; EX 70, 85; Book VIII 9.

⁴⁵⁷ Jeannette Nieuwland, ‘Birgitta’s View of Marriage: Theory Versus Practice’ in *Birgitta, Hendes Vaerk Og hendes Klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Osense Universitetsforlag, 1990), 84.’

⁴⁵⁸ *Revelations*, Book VI 121.

⁴⁵⁹ For fuller discussions on Augustine’s view of marriage as a friendship, see: Fullam, Lisa. ‘Toward a Virtue Ethics of Marriage: Augustine and Aquinas on Friendship in Marriage’ in *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 663-691; Burt, Donald, ‘Friendship and Subordination in Earthly Societies’ in *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991) 83-123; Dyan Elliott, ‘Gender and the Christian Traditions’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* edited by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2013), 25-6.

⁴⁶⁰ *Revelations*, Book VI, 27; Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St Birgitta*, (Stockholm: Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae 51, 1993), 235 n269; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 43.

⁴⁶¹ *Revelations*, Book I, 26.

to be a process of ‘divine love and mutual affection.’ Continuing, God reiterates this point by saying: ‘Once the infant was conceived without sin or lustful pleasure, I would have sent a soul into it out of my divinity, and she would have carried the child and given birth to it without pain. The infant would forthwith have been born perfect like Adam.’⁴⁶² Again, God is clarifying that it is the *lustful*-ness of procreation which remains problematic. Furthermore, it was the action of Original Sin which was responsible for the immense pain of childbirth. Perhaps not surprisingly, in this anecdote Adam was presented as ‘perfect’ and his children, not specified as male or female, were destined to have continued Adam’s perfection. In fact, throughout this particular revelation, God is quick to lay blame on Adam explaining how life *could have* been prior to his sin. Eve, however, is not mentioned at all. Rather, it is *Adam’s* contempt which resulted in original sin: ‘But he showed contempt for this privilege by consenting to the devil and converting a greater glory than I had given him.’⁴⁶³

This particular revelation, entitled ‘Spiritual Marriage is Compared to Human Marriage’, is presented as a lengthy conversation between God and Bridget. Centring largely on the subject of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, God tells Bridget that, after their sin, he gave them permission to have ‘licit intercourse’.⁴⁶⁴ This permission, however was only granted after they learned to worship God again. After the death of their son Abel, Adam and Eve mourned through the practices of sexual abstinence. When they made this choice, God was filled with such compassion that he comforted them through their loss. Subsequently, God let them know his will to ‘[begin] again to have intercourse and to procreate children.’⁴⁶⁵ Yet again, God does not attempt to

⁴⁶² *Revelations*, Book I, 26.

⁴⁶³ *Revelations*, Book I, 26.

⁴⁶⁴ God further explains that it was Adam and Eve’s disobedience which brought upon shame, carnal lust, hunger and thirst. *Revelations*, Book I, 26.

⁴⁶⁵ *Revelations*, Book I, 26.

condemn the act of intercourse – provided it is conducted in conformity with his will. Furthermore, Adam and Eve’s chaste-marriage enabled them to attain the reward of God’s favour.⁴⁶⁶

The relationship of marriage, as explained in this revelation, is not displeasing to God. In fact, marriage carried the possibility of glorifying God through the couple’s love. In a discussion with the Virgin Mary, Bridget is told of a bride and groom whose tender love glorified God so much so that it brought them the attention of ‘their enemy’, the Devil.⁴⁶⁷ Mary describes the various ways the Devil attempts to sabotage the ways in which the partners in the marital union connect: through their letters, mutual conversation and through their bodily union. While elaborating on the Devil’s attempts to prevent the love between the couple, Mary explains that through mutual conversation the bride and groom have become one heart and one soul.⁴⁶⁸ Together as one with the help of God, the groom helps his bride see the lies presented by the Devil and instead together they rejoice in God’s truth.⁴⁶⁹ The story does not leave the reader with the idea that it is the union of the lovers which is distasteful, but rather that it is the act of preventing the two from being together which is wrong.⁴⁷⁰ Both this

⁴⁶⁶ This revelation continues in a similar manner, with marriage maintained as its main subject. Later, as Bridget’s conversation with God turns away from Adam and Eve and instead onto marriage in Bridget’s age, he lists the seven reasons people marry: ‘First, because of facial beauty; second, because of wealth, third because of the coarse pleasure and indecent joy they get out of coition; fourth, because of festivities and uncontrolled gluttony; fifth, because it gives rise to pride in dressing and eating and entertainment and other vanities; sixth, in order to bring up their offspring not for God or good works but for wealth and honour; seventh, they join in wedlock on account of lust and the lustful appetite of beasts.’ *Revelations*, Book I, 26.

⁴⁶⁷ *Revelations*, Book IV, 75.

⁴⁶⁸ Mary also draws mention that the ‘one heart and one soul’ stand for ‘nothing other than penance and contrition’. *Revelations*, Book IV, 75.

⁴⁶⁹ Although not elaborated on within the revelation, there is evidence that this particular passage could also be a metaphor for the relationship between a Christian and their confessor, and the importance the role of confessor plays for a Christian. In describing the Devil’s attempts to sabotage the relationship, Mary refers to the letters and mutual conversation between the bride and groom as prayers—although the mutual conversation could further be interpreted as the sacrament of confession. The naked union between the couple is described as the ‘naked union of God and the soul’ standing for ‘heavenly longing and pure charity.’ The groom’s ultimate success in guiding his bride from the devil’s falsehoods to God’s truth is synonymous to the ideal relationship between confessor and penitent.

⁴⁷⁰ Birger Bergh, ‘A Saint in the Making: St Bridget’s Life in Sweden (1303-1349)’ in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar Third Volume*, ed. Francis Cairns, (Liverpool: ARCA, 1981), 375.

revelation and that mentioned above, ‘Spiritual Marriage is Compared to Human Marriage’, refrain from depicting the marital union negatively, instead it is celebrated for its possible goodness; and the spiritual encouragement which could be gained through partnership.

Despite the seeming praise that is lavished on the marital union, within the revelations the voice of Christ does admit there to Bridget on more than one occasion that virginity is the *most* perfect state. Virginity is a good and excellent state because it is as near to the angelic state as possible. John the Baptist’s virginal state was the most perfect life to live as he had never been tainted with carnal flesh.⁴⁷¹ However, virginity only gained merit if it was maintained with wisdom and virtue. Although virginity was conceived as the most perfect state, it was necessary to retain virginity of the mind as well as the flesh. In other words, it was not enough to maintain a virgin body lustful thoughts were as displeasing as physical lust. Furthermore, maintaining virginity to boost one’s own status could diminish the merit of sexual abstinence and lead to accusations of pride and heresy. Virginity should be maintained as a form of spiritual purity. And those who were able to remain virgins found that their life choice did not come without complications. Bridget’s own daughter, Catherine⁴⁷² was accused by her brother Carl of being a Beguine – a member of a holy order being part of which could leave one open to suspicions of heresy – because she remained a

⁴⁷¹ *Revelations*, VI, 119.

⁴⁷² Catherine was canonized as St Catherine of Sweden in 1484 by Pope Innocent VIII. There is very little remaining on Catherine, she did testify for her mother’s canonization (A&P 303-51) and *vita sancta Katerine* written by Ulf Birgersson, brother at Vadstena. In particular, Morris makes note that Catherine was described as a woman who was transformed from ‘a young, beautiful, worldly girl to a humble, patient and obedient woman.’ On Catherine, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 109-13, especially 109.

virgin: he was also concerned that she was attempting to persuade his wife to take up the same life.⁴⁷³

While marriage and sex presented a woman with possible spiritual anxieties, her widowhood drew her nearer to God. Bridget's own revelations were received during her widowhood, and thus the revelations, including those about virginity and about marriage, are being received in the context of this third life stage. An obedient widow could lead 'everyone into glory'.⁴⁷⁴ Setting aside how pleasing the life-stage was for Christ in a theological or spiritual sense, moreover, legally and socially widowhood was something of a unique 'free' stage where a woman was under no direct lay-male authority. It is also a life stage during which a woman could gain merit through chastity and obedience to God. The possibility of a conflict of interests – between a woman's spiritual duty and her earthly duty to her human husband – was over.

Bridget's revelations thus gave consolation to those who were anxious about their marital status. Her *vita* as given in MS 114, the presentation of her life adapted from her canonisation *vita*, also encouraged such a presentation. It focused upon the chronological development of her life in order to present Bridget as a chaste woman, in all the possible senses of that word, as maiden, wife and widow. The rest of this chapter will investigate in detail the ways in which the MS 114 *vita* presented these three stages of Bridget's life.

⁴⁷³ This created Catherine to be considered an object of gossip. "Non es contenta, quod te beguinam feceras, quin etiam uxorem meam tecum beguinam faceres et fabulam populorum?" *Acta Sanctorum*, March vol. 3, 505. Cited in Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 270; Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 70.

⁴⁷⁴ *Revelations*, Book VI, 111.

Bridget as Virgin

The *vita* in MS 114 remains the backbone of the manuscript, connecting the Birgittine texts (Articles 2-10) with the devotional texts (Articles 12-19). Those articles which physically precede the *vita* act, as we have seen, to defend Bridget's position as a spiritual woman. The manuscript then presents the record of her saintly life, before it concludes with extracts, sermons and notes which echo the devotional themes presented within the first half of the compilation. It is only in the *vita*, however, that MS 114 depicts Bridget's life before her marriage as a virgin—the other Birgittine articles focus instead on her later life. This *vita*, whilst based on that developed as part of the canonization campaign,⁴⁷⁵ presents a selection of the stories that were considered for inclusion in the longer piece, and amongst those are tales which show Bridget's life before her marriage. In the depictions of her early life, Bridget's own visions and the views of those observing her are presented within the context of an ordinary, daily life of work and play. In particular, she is depicted as under the protection of the Virgin Mary as well as Christ: the spiritual parents who replace her own deceased physical parents.

Bridget's published revelations are all attributed to the period of her widowhood.⁴⁷⁶ However, the *vita* depicts Bridget's first spiritual experiences as occurring in her youth.⁴⁷⁷ Although only a handful of anecdotes describe Bridget's early life as a virgin, it is nevertheless presented as an important time in Bridget's life. The *vita* shows the virginal Bridget experiencing her first visions. It is at this age that she encounters both the Virgin Mary and Christ for the first time and also first

⁴⁷⁵ Isak Colijn, ed. *Acta et Processus Canonizacionis Beate Birgitte*, (Uppsala, Sweden: SSFS, ser. 2, Lat. Skrifter 1, 1924-31), 73-101.

⁴⁷⁶ Searby, ed., *Revelations Vol. I*, 1.

⁴⁷⁷ The *vita* refers to these experiences as Bridget seeing 'wonderful things.' Latin: *vidit admirata*. MS 114, fo. 55rb.

confronts the devil directly, as a deformed creature ‘having a hundred hands and feet’ whom Bridget defeats calling upon the aid of ‘the crucified one’ although the experience caused her ‘grief of the heart’.⁴⁷⁸ The first of her visions, however, involves the appearance of an unidentified lady, an altar, and a crown. While Bridget was sleeping, she saw across from her bed an altar, and above the altar was a woman holding a crown. With haste, Bridget ran to the altar and the woman said to her: ‘do you want to have this crown?’⁴⁷⁹ The lady then placed the crown upon Bridget’s head. When Bridget returns to her bed the vision disappears but ‘she could never forget it.’⁴⁸⁰ Although the lady remains anonymous in all versions of Bridget’s *vita*, she is customarily interpreted to be the Virgin Mary.

This particular vision occurred when Bridget was seven years old, and although the *vita* does not specifically connect the crown to Christ’s crown of thorns, the anecdote directly following is ‘When she saw Christ crucified’, underlining this possible parallel.⁴⁸¹ A few years later, at the age of ten, after hearing the passion of Christ preached in church, and as with her first vision while sleeping she had a vision of Christ’s crucifixion. When she asked Christ, ‘who did this to you?’ he answered, ‘Those who scorn me and neglect my life.’ The *vita* describes this experience as a warning which affected Bridget to such extent she could never recall the memory without tears.⁴⁸²

In addition to her own visions, Bridget is seen by others to be under special spiritual protection. Prior to her birth, her mother while pregnant with Bridget, was on a sinking ship. Although many people drowned, her mother was saved and brought to

⁴⁷⁸ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁴⁷⁹ Ending punctuation is my own, MS 114, 55r-b.

⁴⁸⁰ MS 114, fo. 55r-b.

⁴⁸¹ Again, while not specified, the unknown woman has often been interpreted as the Virgin Mary with the crown acting as a symbolic Crown of Virginité. MS 114, fo. 55r-v.

⁴⁸² Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 78.

shore. Later that night, an apparition said to Bridget's mother: 'You are saved because of the good you have in the womb, nourish it because God has bestowed his charity upon you.'⁴⁸³ Additionally, as a young girl, Bridget is seen at one point to be producing beautiful needlework, far beyond the abilities of a child of her age, with the help of a woman (certainly intended to be the Virgin) who draws the thread for her, but whom Bridget herself claims to be unable to see. Here the Virgin acts as teacher and maternal guide to the young Bridget.⁴⁸⁴

By Bridget's twelfth year, the *vita* describes Bridget's interactions with her maternal aunt who took custody of Bridget after her mother's death in more detail. The aunt is described as a 'very devout and praiseworthy' woman. Nevertheless, she is shown as the first person to doubt the validity of Bridget's spiritual claims. Bridget's aunt is seen as greatly fearing that Bridget has been tempted into evil. The aunt is shown in three different anecdotes: 'How an unknown girl was seen sitting beside her', 'How the aunt found Bridget praying at night', and 'How she saw the devil'.⁴⁸⁵ All three tales show the aunt's initial doubt and confusion. In particular, the aunt is seen attempting to scold Bridget with a switch when she suspects Bridget of levity ('How the aunt found Bridget praying at night'), but the switch breaks before it can make contact with Bridget's flesh. Bridget, specifically referred to here as 'the Virgin', explains to her aunt that she arose from bed to praise 'the crucified one whom [she] saw'.⁴⁸⁶ With this, Bridget's aunt was converted: she began to believe in Bridget's visions and thus 'began to love her more fervently.'⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ MS 114, fo. 55ra.

⁴⁸⁴ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁴⁸⁵ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁴⁸⁶ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁴⁸⁷ The three anecdotes appear in succession, MS 114, fo. 55v.

This last anecdote is the only place in the *vita* when Bridget is referred to as ‘the virgin’, and is the only mention of her virginity. Bridget’s aunt attempts physically to punish Bridget when she suspects the young woman of speaking ‘wicked prayers’ (charms or spells), but the switch ‘broke on the back of the virgin.’⁴⁸⁸ In all other instance Bridget is referred to by name or simply as ‘*puella*’. It could be that Bridget is referred to here as the virgin to present a further parallel between Bridget and the Virgin Mary, in addition to her earlier crowning by the Virgin. Certainly, the depiction of her interactions with Mary are important in presenting her as a model: Mary herself in the later middle ages was a defining model of femininity, including as daughter and virgin.⁴⁸⁹ The comparison drawn between Bridget and Mary and the Virgin’s guidance of the younger woman, where Bridget herself becomes the daughter, reinstates Bridget as gendered young woman rather than as genderless saint.⁴⁹⁰

Bridget as Wife

As a dutiful and obedient wife, Bridget abandons her virginity: although not immediately, and not for the whole length of her marriage. Throughout her marriage, Bridget is shown to be practising not complete sexual abstinence, but sexual discipline, as a form of chastity and self-control. For Bridget, as indeed for the Virgin Mary herself, the move from young unmarried virgin to married woman was not definitive, but rather shaded in grey. In 1316, Bridget is said to have married Ulf Gudmarsson.⁴⁹¹ In her *vita*, and in the Birgittine articles contained within MS 114,

⁴⁸⁸ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁴⁸⁹ Kim M. Philips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, c. 1270-1540*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 77.

⁴⁹⁰ Teresa P. Reed, *Shadows of Mary* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)

⁴⁹¹ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 40.

Bridget never seems to have sought to avoid marriage. Unlike some other female saints whose families sought to have them married against their wishes and their active protests, women such as the twelfth-century English holy woman, Christina of Markyate, Bridget accepted her lay obligations to her family and society.⁴⁹² In fact, as we have seen, several of her revelations defended the status of a married woman (or man) in comparison to that of a virgin: ‘a God-fearing housewife, who is in control of herself and lives according to the rule of her state, can win equal merit as a humble and modest virgin.’⁴⁹³ Yet for Bridget, marriage is not shown as an immediate end to virginity. She is concerned, says the *vita* that her marriage should be of an ‘honourable’ nature.⁴⁹⁴ She therefore enters into a chaste marriage. Bridget is able to convince her husband that they should spend their first years of marriage as virgins, waiting to consummate the marriage until she is certain that this is pleasing to Christ. This means that for the first year of their marriage, Bridget and Ulf chose to remain virginal after which they received God’s blessing to consummate their marriage in order that they should have children.⁴⁹⁵ Bridget’s ability to persuade her husband to live in chastity together at the beginning of their marriage leads the *vita* to declare that

⁴⁹² Bridget’s daughter Catherine does testify for the canonization material that her mother would have rather died than marry, but this view is not reflected in any of Bridget’s own works. It is thought that Catherine took this stance in order to create a more pleasing view of her mother for canonization. *A&P*, 305; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 41.

⁴⁹³ *Revelations*, IV 71.

⁴⁹⁴ The *vita* takes care to specify that they were ‘married together honourably’. MS 114, fo. 55v-b.

⁴⁹⁵ Unfortunately, at this point in the manuscript there occurs a scribal error of several lines missing. MS 114 describes Bridget and Ulf marrying ‘honourably’ and ‘loving God’; but there is then a break in the description of their early marriage: the next line describes their first year of virginity together but makes no grammatical sense as a continuous piece. After analysing the missing lines in comparison with the original version of the *vita*, the conclusion was that this was a simple scribal error rather than an intentional choice to exclude specific information. The passage should read as follows (italics mark missing lines, brought over from Tjader-Harris translation): ‘Meanwhile, she found herself betrothed to a rich and noble man and they were married together honourably and indeed loving God *both spouses lived in virginity for one year, devoutly asking god that if they ought to come together he, the Creator of all, would from them create an offspring that would be at his service. She truly loved God and was most wary of herself* to prevent so as not to give anyone to occasion to speak wrongly to her...’ MS 114, fos 55vb -56ra; For an unedited version of the canonisation *vita*, not identical to the version in MS 114, see: Tjader-Harris, *Life and Selected Revelations*, 74-5.

her marital status had equal merit before God with the virginal life.⁴⁹⁶ This overlap from young virgin to virginal and chaste wife means that even after marriage Bridget is said to be living in a praiseworthy state. Bridget then enters her marriage in a state of merit.

The *vita* treats Bridget's time as a wife quite differently to that of her youth. Her early years are marked by stories of visions, and of conversations with Christ and with the Virgin Mary which would become the forerunners of her later revelations. As a wife Bridget is not said to have received visions. Instead, the *vita* shifts from listing anecdotes of spiritual experiences, to the description of Bridget's wifely habits. Details of Bridget's daily behaviour and particularly her spiritual habits are given through anecdotes in her *vita*. Fervent prayer, daily confession, fasting, devotional reading, and generous almsgivings are the highlight of Bridget's marital life.⁴⁹⁷ In each anecdote, the *vita* emphasizes Bridget's discipline, but also her obedience. 'How she prayed' specifies that Bridget had 'discipline at all times proceeding and always petitioning her prayers to God that some suitable manner of prying might be poured over her.'⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, in 'About confession' it is stipulated Bridget had a '...most experienced master confessor whom she was devoted in prayer, and she obeyed him in all hardships...'⁴⁹⁹ 'Of Reading' is more direct in addressing Bridget's obedience by prefacing her habits with 'when she was not labouring...', further indicating that Bridget did not forsake her wifely duties for her spiritual ones.⁵⁰⁰ All three passages focus on Bridget's discipline, control and obedience. Additionally, the indication in

⁴⁹⁶ Their time of virginal contemplation lasted at least a year, although some accounts say this could be longer. After the end of their virginal contemplation, their sexual relations always began by praying for a child. This is mentioned in Bridget's *vita*, however where this mention should be in the *vita* is absent in MS 114, from the script in the manuscript it seems as if this was due to scribal error and not purposeful omission. MS 114, fo. 55vb; A&P, 77; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 44-5.

⁴⁹⁷ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁴⁹⁸ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁴⁹⁹ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁵⁰⁰ MS 114, fo. 56r.

‘Of fasting’ of Bridget’s secret abstention from food promotes not only Bridget’s spirituality, but also her humility.⁵⁰¹

Largely, the *vita* largely omits any mention of Bridget’s more practical household habits as a wife. The exception is the anecdote ‘How she educated her children’ detailing the ‘care and diligence’ she held in educating both her sons and daughters.⁵⁰² According to the *vita*, Bridget had instructors teach her children discipline and behaviour while she ‘wept daily over their sins out of fear that they had offended God.’⁵⁰³ Although this passage begins with the practical education of Bridget’s children, it ends with John the Baptist appearing to reassure Bridget: ‘Because you wept over your son who offended me by not fasting at the vigil and because you would rather have him to serve me than the king, I shall help him and arm him with my arms.’⁵⁰⁴ While this is not a conventional form of education, and not providing any educational interaction between Bridget and her children, this remains a depiction of a form of spiritual instruction on her children’s behalf.

In describing her habits, the *vita* remarks how her prayer habits were ‘so very fervent’ that they only occurred when her husband was absent: her duty to her husband does not crowd out her spiritual devotions, but rather forms a part of them when he is present.⁵⁰⁵ Whereas her virginity introduced Bridget to her divine spiritual future, her martial state focuses on depicting her devotion inasmuch as it does not interfere with her marital duties to her husband. Bridget represents, in the *vita*, a humble and obedient wife.

⁵⁰¹ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁵⁰² MS 114, fo. 56va.

⁵⁰³ MS 114, fo. 56va.

⁵⁰⁴ MS 114, fo. 56va.

⁵⁰⁵ MS 114, fo. 56r.

Bridget's earthly marriage to Ulf was successful in the sense that it produced eight Christian children.⁵⁰⁶ One daughter, Catherine, was married but like her mother Catherine spent the first years of her marriage as a virgin, and during this time her husband died. Catherine sought to maintain her unique status as an unmarried virgin-widow and to aid her mother's spiritual vocation.⁵⁰⁷ Bridget's *vita* depicts the harshness of the pregnancies that she experienced.⁵⁰⁸ While lying in her own bed Bridget is on the verge of death while trying to give birth to her child.⁵⁰⁹ Women who care about her surround Bridget, trying to help her through the difficult childbirth. Ultimately, the women who are with Bridget fear she will not survive, but Bridget's strong faith prevails and brings the Virgin Mary to her bed and it is through the Virgin Mary that Bridget is finally able to give birth easily.⁵¹⁰ Bridget's faith allows her to overcome a perilous childbirth and, with Mary's help, she is relieved of pain. The story once again emphasises her relationship with, and the protection by, the Virgin.

Bridget's sexuality is only foregrounded specifically when she tries to have children. Because Bridget married Ulf when she was thirteen her menstruation cycles might not have been fully regular at this time and even if she was regularly menstruating, she was still a virgin until she was fourteen years old. The *vita* also demonstrates that Bridget and Ulf adopted a chaste marriage once she was obviously no longer fertile. Her widowhood also continued the life of chastity. Here we see a

⁵⁰⁶ On Bridget's children, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 46-52.

⁵⁰⁷ It should be noted here that Bridget's daughter, Catherine, married Lord Eggert van Kyren at around the age of twelve or thirteen. Together they agreed to continue their marriage in virginity. However, in 1349 while accompanying her mother to Rome, Catherine's husband died and she spent the rest of her wildwood a virgin and continuing her mother's religious causes. For a brief overview of Bridget's daughter, Catherine, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 109-113.

⁵⁰⁸ This infamous pregnancy became recognized as Bridget's mystical pregnancy, even her confessor claims to have felt the divine child within Bridget's womb. *A&P*, 500; Dyan Elliott, 'Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body' in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100-1500*, eds Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 28.

⁵⁰⁹ MS 114, fo. 56rb.

⁵¹⁰ MS 114, fo. 56rb.

consistent minimization of any periods of sexuality, which is instead condensed into the relatively few years in which she was trying to have children—the only acceptable time to engage in sexual activities. Any potential pollution deriving from her sexuality are eliminated and her spirituality is therefore enhanced by the presentation of this aspect of her life story.

Menstruation was an aspect of female sexuality that was met with an obsession of purification with all who came in contact with a menstruating woman.⁵¹¹ A menstruating woman was sexually off limits, with the impurities deemed to stem from the blood shed. The same opinion of impurity applied to women during childbirth. It is important to note that the medieval era only saw impurities in some blood that was shed.⁵¹² While blood flowing from a woman in both childbirth and menstruation was considered highly impure, blood derived from circumcision was not.⁵¹³ Moreover, some blood, such as that which was shed in battle, was deemed as somehow noble. The justification for why some blood was impure and other blood was not seeming to stem from the voluntary nature of how the blood was shed.⁵¹⁴ Yet it seems as if the sexist implications were not wholly absent. Nevertheless, the fear and anxiety that was present over the female blood polluting not only the woman experiencing the bloodshed, but also those who came into contact with her was the same type of social anxiety that was felt over the tempting nature of women. Despite these social fears, a woman could not get away from certain aspects of her sexuality, such as menstruation. Even virgins would have involuntarily menstruated. The fear, therefore,

⁵¹¹ Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 2-3.

⁵¹² Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 3.

⁵¹³ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 22-25 and 41-42; Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage in Judaism an Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 180-1, 187-89; Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 3 n9. Both Eilberg-Schwartz and Elliott note that the discriminatory view on bloodshed—between menstruation and circumcision—is due to the involuntary nature with which the blood is shed. The conclusion is that it is not the blood itself which is of issue but where and how it comes from which matters.

⁵¹⁴ *ibid.*

and the unavoidable inferiority of women shines through with every aspect of their sexuality.

Apart from the general anxiety that surrounded the conjugal debt, consummating the marriage, and controlling lust, there also was trepidation over not having children and the issues that could arise from a lack of children. It was not only having children that was of concern, but also having the right kind of children: children with good moral qualities, were well behaved, conformed to social norms and lived a Christian lifestyle. From a religious point of view, producing the right kind of children was necessary to continue not only the family's earthly legacy but also producing future generations of good Christians.

After having their children, Bridget convinced her husband Ulf to continue the remainder of their marriage in perfect continence.⁵¹⁵ Bridget understood this to be a chaste marriage which would be most pleasing to Christ and would also demonstrate her humility and obedience towards God. This state could be presented as on a par with virginity. A chaste marriage was 'a relationship which is a normal marriage in every sense except that the participants abstain from sexual activity.'⁵¹⁶ Atkinson has discussed this concept and a form of 'honorary virginity' that women could gain in the later Middle Ages by living in a chaste lifestyle.⁵¹⁷ This allowed women who were unable or unwilling to live a chaste lifestyle not be deterred by their own lack of virginity. Bridget's later marital years in continence and her humble and chaste widowhood followed this approach. This allowed Bridget to circumvent the

⁵¹⁵ In the *vita* it refers to Bridget and Ulf as freeing themselves from the vanity of the world. MS 114, fo. 56va; A&P, 80; For a general exploration on the concept of spiritual and chaste marriages, see: Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵¹⁶ Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll, 'Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: "It were to hire a greet merite"' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1996), 103.

⁵¹⁷ See: Clarissa W. Atkinson, 'Precious Balsam and Fragile Glass: The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), 131-43.

limitations of her sexual history. Following the model of St Augustine, Bridget's chaste marriage was still deemed a successful marriage as these later years proved a marriage based on friendship and love through the heart instead of a lustful love of each other's bodies. This was even more evident, as Augustine's views became the accepted trend on female sexuality, it allowed women who were not virgins, but who did live a chaste life style, to achieve this 'honorary virginity' status and explore a spiritual vocation.⁵¹⁸

While male theologians presented a diversified approach to female sexuality the differing ideologies of female sexuality, some women experienced a form of guilt over their own sexuality combined with a fear and/or dislike over sex. Margery Kempe, a late fourteenth – early fifteenth century English mystic, struggled with her own sexuality. Sex seemed to be an issue to which Margery constantly struggled with, particularly with her own lustful temptations. Specifically, Margery struggled with her feelings of lust despite her own desire to be chaste; as well as her husband's inability to let her live chastely.⁵¹⁹ Margery Kempe used the lives of two female religious models to try and craft her own spirituality: these women were Mary of Oignies and Bridget. For Margery, both Mary and Bridget's celibate marriages were a substitute for the perpetual virginity that they, and she, desired.⁵²⁰

Devotional literature, such as Bridget's *vita*, was able to utilise a saint as a character model to give their readers a pattern of behaviour as both wife and mother.⁵²¹ The narration of Bridget's life was able to serve this role: as her gender

⁵¹⁸ McGlynn and Moll, 'Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages', 110.

⁵¹⁹ Kim M. Philips, 'Margery Kempe and the Ages of Woman' in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* eds by John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press 2004), 35.

⁵²⁰ Sarah Salih, 'Staging Conversion: The Digby Saint plays and the *Book of Margery Kempe*' in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, eds Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 122.

⁵²¹ Pat Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg have applied this idea in their work on the influence of the cult of St Sitha on Margaret Blackburn. Felicity Riddy also discusses the influence of a non-devotional text, 'How the Goodwife Taught her Daughter' on its audience. See: Pat Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg.

was re-established within the first part of her *vita* so it could be maintained in the second section through practice, rather than through visionary descriptions, of her spiritual experiences. In the *vita*, *Bridget* is depicted as a devout woman who begins and ends her marriage as she began it, by living in chastity, a form of marriage which earns her merit with God. Only as an unmarried young woman, and again during her widowhood, was Bridget given direct directions from Christ which were in her later years to become her revelations.

Bridget as Widow

Bridget's marriage ended in chastity, however it was not until her widowhood that she could whole-heartedly pursue her spiritual vocation.⁵²² Like the biblical Judith, in her widowhood Bridget was able to devote herself completely to God as the bride not of man but of Christ.⁵²³ This widowhood was a stage in life where a woman was, likely for the first time, not to be under the direct authority of a lay man. This could create a sense of vulnerability for a woman, but it also could leave her free to live her spiritual lifestyle without owing a marital debt, both practical and sexual, to her husband. Widowhood further freed women from biological impurities beyond sexual intercourse. Although not always perfectly coinciding with the inauguration of her widowhood, a woman's last life-stage – where her widowhood was not expected

'How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of hours' in *Medieval Women: Texts and Context in Late Medieval Britain*, eds Jocelyn Wogan Browne et al, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 227-8; Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text' *Speculum* 71 (1996), 66-86.

⁵²² Anja Petrakopoulos draws this conclusion specifically for Elizabeth of Hungary while mentioning the same was true for other religious women. Anja Petrakopoulos, 'Sanctity and Motherhood: Elizabeth of Thuringia' in *Sanctity and Motherhood*, ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 263.

⁵²³ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 172.

to be followed by re-marriage – was also often associated with menopause and thus the end of the impurities of childbirth and menstruation.⁵²⁴

Before Bridget's widowhood, her sexuality is only mentioned twice: early on in her life, as we have already seen, when she is referred to as 'the virgin' and upon entering her marriage when she chose to enter upon a chaste marriage, with her husband's agreement. Following her husband's death, the *vita* depicts Bridget as grieving over her state and anxious over her status of a non-virgin when Christ appears and tells her not to be afraid because she is his 'bride and channel.'⁵²⁵ Christ then tells Bridget that from that moment, as his bride and channel, she will hear and see spiritual things, and through his spirit she will be given divine directions.⁵²⁶

After this assurance from Christ that despite her marital state, her other acts of obedience, and particularly her chastity at the start and end of her marriage, make her his bride, Bridget receives her first revelation.⁵²⁷ Soon after this moment, Bridget was instructed to join a certain monastery.⁵²⁸ During her time residing at the monastery, Bridget received several more revelations assuring her that she would be given 'understanding of spiritual things' from Christ through which she would gain greater holiness.⁵²⁹

Despite Bridget's previous devout nature during her marriage, and the divine approval she received as a young woman, only during this widowhood did Bridget gain this access to a greater holiness. Furthermore, it was during her widowhood that

⁵²⁴ On widowhood and remarriage, see: James A. Brundage, 'Widows and Remarriage: Moral Conflicts and Their Resolution in Classical Canon Law' in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 17-32; Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Remarriage as an Option for Urban and Rural Widows in Late Medieval England' in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 141-164.

⁵²⁵ MS 114, fos 56v-57r.

⁵²⁶ MS 114, fo. 57r.

⁵²⁷ The manuscript dates this first revelation as occurring in 1344, MS 114, fo. 57r.

⁵²⁸ MS 114, fo. 57r.

⁵²⁹ MS 114, fo. 57r.

her piety was used to greater influence over others. Previously she was depicted as only positively influencing her husband and children's lives. Now, however, Bridget was ordered by Christ to address the king and the bishop.⁵³⁰ With both men, Bridget did not need to know beforehand what to say as Christ tells her to 'open your mouth and I will fill it.'⁵³¹

This could be a point at which Bridget's gender identification was broken down: her revelations, her challenges to powerful leaders both secular and spiritual, were the points upon which her sanctity was later challenged, and as we have seen this could lead to a gender neutral, even a masculine, presentation of the saint. Yet, within her *vita*, hints which are still found in Alfonso's work are further developed. Bridget is not left completely independent: she is still placed under male authority, but now as the bride of Christ. Mary, who had been so important a spiritual protector in Bridget's girlhood, is in her widowhood superseded by a male authority figure, Christ. She enters, in effect, into another form of marriage, a perpetually chaste marriage. It is Christ, not Bridget, who speaks to figures in authority: the issue of speech and obedience is one which will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Within all the texts included in the Birgittine half of MS 114, the construction of Bridget as a saint and as a woman was of priority; although not infrequently the expected constructions of these two identities clashed. Bridget's gender was seen as a handicap to the presentation of her role as spiritual leader; as a woman, she could be seen as in a position of weakness in comparison to masculine strength. To subvert this

⁵³⁰ These people appear in two separate anecdotes, the king and bishop are not named specifically, however this occurred before she is ordered to go to Rome, so presumably these men were also Swedish. MS 114, fo. 58r.

⁵³¹ MS 114, fo. 58r.

disadvantage, it was essential for her to be seen to adhere to a certain set of standards in the *discretio spirituum* or the discernment of spirits. While the authors of those texts included in MS 114 could attempt to soften the potency of Bridget's femininity, ultimately her womanhood could not be erased. Through these texts the societal tensions which concerned their authors are reflected, in considering all Bridget's experience of all the female life stages as well as shifting trends in perceptions of holy women.

Prior to the twelfth century, female saints were primarily virgins and martyrs—or indeed both. During the thirteenth century, and increasingly throughout the fourteenth century, lay devotional habits came to be focused on Christ's humanity and suffering. Society's new focus on Christ's human life led, by extension, to a greater focus on his mother: the Virgin Mary. These shifting trends gave a new spiritual value to motherhood. This provided a way for Bridget, when authors were constructing her as a saint, to praise her for her behaviour during and response to each of her life stages.

Bridget's contemporary reputation as a pious woman was often challenged her claim of religious authority was seen by some commentators to be incompatible with the necessary behaviour of the pious female, as the early articles in MS 114 demonstrate. One answer to this criticism was to present Bridget in a gender-neutral form, neither male nor female as saint and visionary. Yet the manuscript also wishes to present Bridget as a model of womanhood. As an early *devotio moderna* manuscript, it seeks to use Bridget's *vita* in the way in which later sister books would be used, as a pattern for a pious female life. Bridget was to be used to portray a praiseworthy life, one in which she was a young unmarried woman, a wife and mother and also the Bride of Christ.

Bridget thus needed to be presented here as pious woman as well as as a saint. The form of the *vita* used within MS 114, made up of a selection of stories drawn from the canonization *vita* produced for Bridget, emphasises her role as a woman within a different, more domestic, context. The *vita* gives a linear timeline of Bridget's life, providing anecdotes for each life stage and describing her actions within it: actions which eventually fashioned Bridget into the saint she became.⁵³² Bridget's earthly marriage to Ulf was successful in the sense that it produced eight children who lived to adulthood – and yet, it is hardly what would be considered a chaste marriage such as might be expected of a virgin saint. She was able to be obedient in both her spiritual and wifely statuses by convincing her husband to both begin and end their marriage in chastity. In this way, by controlling her sexual impulses and behaviour, Bridget was able to achieve a praiseworthy state similar to a virgin.

A woman's obedience was tightly connected with her sexual habits. A woman's body, and therefore her sexuality, was largely seen as the source of her inferiority and subordination to the male sex.⁵³³ An unmarried woman was expected to remain a virgin, a married woman should give her husband the marital debt, and a widow should remain chaste.⁵³⁴ Bridget's demonstrations of obedience are an important part of her presentation within the *vita*, including with her relationships her relationships, and this obedience and its expression through the control of the voice will be the subject of the next chapter.

⁵³² There is some overlap in the latter half of the *vita*, where a later anecdote will reference Bridget's life before her husband died. However, these anecdotes are clearly defined.

⁵³³ Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, 'Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology' in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 218.

⁵³⁴ For a succinct discussion on medieval sexuality see: Ruth Evans, 'Introduction: What was Sexuality in the Middle Ages?' in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Middle Ages Vol. 2*, ed. Ruth Evans, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-36; Gail Hawkes, *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 43.

Chapter Four

Engaged Listener: Bridget's Obedient Use of Voice in MS 114

*Whoever has received knowledge and eloquence in speech from God should not be silent or secretive but demonstrate it willing.*⁵³⁵

Introduction

This chapter will consider the idea of obedience expressed through the voice (its use or through silence) as it is found within MS 114. It will discuss contemporary fear of the female voice, and how Bridget, as she appears within the manuscript, is constructed so as to reassure the reader, and to circumvent any danger inherent in her speech as a woman. It will further use the background context to the *devotio moderna* movement, presented in chapter one, to examine how Bridget as a literary model influenced later, known, *devotio moderna* sister books.

In Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 114 St Bridget of Sweden is depicted as a model of total, female obedience. As seen in the previous chapter, Bridget's chastity as depicted in all her life stages, was seen to place her within a praiseworthy state. Although Bridget was a married woman, her life demonstrated the spiritual ideals of marital chastity, and her chaste widowhood made her a model of Christian womanhood. Bridget's sexual activity during her marriage becomes less problematic than might be expected because she addressed her engagement with sex in an appropriate manner, placing it within the context of procreation and divine permission. Similarly, MS 114's depiction of Bridget's voice demonstrates both her control of her speech and her obedience, both in silence and in speaking. Like the presentation of Bridget's sexuality and gender, her choice of when to speak and what

⁵³⁵ Joan Ferrante and Robert Hanning, transl., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Durham: Baker Book House, 1978), 28.

to say is presented as spiritually appropriate. Obedience was one of the most important of the *devotio moderna* virtues, as discussed in Chapter One. The obedient women of the sister books – Salome Stiken whose words were obeyed by both her female peers as well as their cat– are an example that we have met before.⁵³⁶ Obedience – and of course connected to obedience were humility and chastity – was intended to be practiced by both the men and the women who lived quasi-monastic lifestyles, focusing on their devotion as laity without any official monastic vows. Although these practices remained a particular concern throughout *devotio moderna* literature, they were not the only virtues practiced by the movement. An interior life – and in particular the acceptable use of silence, for example in prayer and in them mass, which in this movement was held in silence without singing in order to provide time for meditation – was also central to members’ lives. Silence was judged to be a part of the imitation of Christ and it was also an important part of the examination of consciences, the acceptance of fraternal (or sororial) correction and thus of obedience itself.⁵³⁷ In this context it was also about control: Salome Stiken is said to have used her voice sparingly and correctly, for example.⁵³⁸

Silence was also important in concepts of medieval female obedience in general terms. Primarily a woman’s silence was preferred because it reduced the possibility of her falling into temptation or sin. Throughout the manuscript,

⁵³⁶ Mathilde van Dijk, ‘Female Leadership and Authority in the Sister book of Diepenveen’ in *Mulieres Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, eds Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 245.

⁵³⁷ Discussed previously in Chapter One, the *devotio moderna* work by Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, was a popular devotional reading which was circulated widely amongst various European devotional circles.

⁵³⁸ Richard Vallidesau, *The Beauty of the Cross: the Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 170-1; Otto Gründler, ‘Devotio Moderna atque Antiqua: the Modern Devotion and Carthusian Spirituality’, in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom Volume 2: The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 27-45; Morimchi Watanabe, *Nicholas of Cusa: a Companion to his Life and to his Times*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 1988), 34-5.

particularly in her *vita*, that is her saint's life, Bridget is shown to be keeping silence. When Bridget does use her voice, it is done in the context of obedience to God and with a specific purpose. Obedient use of the voice is depicted as being for one's own personal spiritual benefit, for example in confession and prayer, both of which were important expressions of personal piety in *devotio moderna*. Bridget is also shown as using her voice to encourage religious obedience in others. On occasion, Bridget even approaches prominent male figures in order to instruct them on certain matters. In these cases, it is not Bridget's own thoughts that she expresses through her speech; rather she acts as Christ's channel, as Christ is said to instruct her: 'Open your mouth and I will fill it.'⁵³⁹ In both Bridget's use of her voice, and in her silence, she exercises control. It is this control over when and how she speaks which makes Bridget a model of obedience throughout MS 114, and a model that is a fitting pattern for women who are following the pathway of the *devotio moderna* movement.

Fourteenth and fifteenth-century Christianity preferred the silent and obedient woman, often exemplified by a focus on the figure of Mary. Eve's negative example demonstrated the consequences of those women who did not practice silent obedience; although the effects in that case – the fall of humanity – were hardly expected to be repeated. Eve's actions were used to emphasise the dangerous consequences of a woman speaking. This lack of obedience was also emphasised in *devotio moderna* literature. Surviving *devotio moderna* works elaborate upon these failures as demonstrating the importance of obedience and humility to pious Christian devotion and they also then depicted the correct model for the laity's day to day life.

⁵³⁹ MS 114 fo. 58r.

Devotio moderna sister books, in particular, used this literary mode as a way to instil within their female members an understanding of the importance of these virtues.⁵⁴⁰

MS 114 does not provide extensive examples of disobedience, although the example of Mary Magdalene, in the sermon considered in detail in chapter 2, serves as a reminder of the possibility of redemption for the disobedient female sinner. Rather, the manuscript emphasises the other way forward: it offers its reader – or listener – Bridget as a model of reverent prayer (right speech) and of the practice of obedience through silence, who understood when and how it was acceptable for a woman to speak. MS 114's Birgittine articles are conveniently gathered within the first half of the manuscript, while the second half contains extracts from more general texts, though still referring to devotion and obedience. Of the ten articles which do discuss Bridget, it is Bridget's *vita* which provides the majority of personal stories which show patterns of female obedience, with the remaining nine Bridget articles describing her obedient behaviour more generally.

When considering Bridget's *vita* within the larger genre of saints' lives there are certain expectations regarding conventions and *topoi* of what should constitute a saint's *vita*—and in this sense, Bridget's *vita* follows the standard form. However, as Robert Bartlett comments, saints' *vitae* are also 'products of individual circumstance and environment.'⁵⁴¹ This is true when considering, as Bartlett does, individual lives of individual saints – but it is equally important in thinking about the context and creation of an individual manuscript in which such a life is included. It is evident that the compilation context was crucial when the compilers chose what to include in the

⁵⁴⁰ Johannes Brinckerinck, who was particularly instrumental in the development of the *devotio moderna* house of sisters at Diepenveen and who enforced the use of the Rule of St Augustine there, in particular did his best to teach women the importance of both humility and obedience. Wybren Scheepersma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 1.

⁵⁴¹ Robert Bartlett, "Rewriting Saints' Lives: the case of Gerald of Wales' *Speculum* 58 (1983), 598.

manuscript, for example, in their conscious choice to include a slightly abridged version of Bridget's canonical *vita*.⁵⁴² The *vita* in MS 114 refrains from specifically identifying any personal names or places which ordinarily occur within the *vita*—with the exception of Bridget herself and select biblical names. This, specific, choice whilst emphasising Bridget as an individual placed her within a non-specific, generalised context where she was able to fill the role of an archetypal saintly model alongside other biblical figures. Using stories told about Bridget in MS 114, supplemented with an understanding of the *devotio moderna* context in which this manuscript was produced, this chapter will examine the various ways obedient silence and speech is depicted throughout the manuscript. This will be discussed within the context of ideas of what was obedient behaviour for fourteenth and fifteenth-century women.

Dangerous Voices

Understanding women to be a source of potential danger was not a new concept in fourteenth-century society. When studying medieval women as ideal models, particularly within a religious context, it is impossible to ignore the reputational influence that biblical women had on lay society. Of all biblical women, none were as influential, as famous or as infamous, as the Blessed Virgin and Eve. The two women are oppositional behavioural archetypes: one the epitome of obedience and the other of disobedience. Sally A. Livingston, in her work on women's narratives, notes how medieval male writers defined the two images of Eve and Mary: 'Eve, the "bad" woman who transgresses and brings down her husband

⁵⁴² The differences between the Canonical *vita* and the *vita* in MS 114 are discussed in more depth in Chapter Two of this thesis.

with herself, and Mary, the “good” woman who transcends her bodily state and nourishes her child.⁵⁴³ As the mother of God, Mary helped to create a potential channel for a fallen humanity, leading it towards salvation and as a result entry into heaven, while Eve was responsible for humanity’s fall and herself descended to Hell. Disobeying God’s commands, Eve ate from the tree of knowledge and revealed the danger of female temptation by persuading Adam into sin. Adam himself often becomes lost in medieval narrations of this particular biblical story while Eve stands out, depicted as the prototypical dangerous woman.⁵⁴⁴ Here it is the woman’s voice which is dangerous, for it is through what Eve says that sin arrives in Eden. Eve’s voice then is the most dangerous voice of all; it both represents sin and it covers for deception.⁵⁴⁵ The voice of the Blessed Virgin Mary rests in contrast to Eve’s. Mary stoically accepts God’s orders without question, in particular at the Annunciation. She uses her voice sparingly and to acquiesce not to question or to argue, and this is emphasised in depictions of her as the ideal womanly model. Late medieval devotional teachings offered these two biblical women as different examples of expectations and ideals, but also as reasons why men – and women – should fear the female voice due to the potential dangers of uncontrolled temptation.

Many earlier societies, including pagan societies, had feared women in some fashion, usually as a source of lustful temptation.⁵⁴⁶ In a Judaeo-Christian context, the linking of the danger of speaking women with Eve’s convincing Adam to sin, leading

⁵⁴³ Sally A. Livingston, *Marriage, Property, and Women’s Narratives*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 27.

⁵⁴⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 15-20.

⁵⁴⁵ Both Livingston and Bloch discuss this concept, see: Livingston, *Marriage, Property, and Women’s Narratives*, 19-34; Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 17.

⁵⁴⁶ McNamara, JoAnn. ‘Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought’ *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976) 145.

to the fall,⁵⁴⁷ associated the moral character of women, with sin and soon with lustful temptation.⁵⁴⁸ This further enforced the idea that it was not just Eve as a woman but, in particular, Eve's use of her voice which had initiated sin. Eve's initial disobedience to God's command, her conversation with the serpent and her spoken questioning of God's command as well as then her spoken temptation of Adam, was judged to be the beginning of humanity's fall.⁵⁴⁹ Ultimately, it was Eve's inappropriate use of her voice which was used to explain the misogynistic tradition of creating a fearful and dangerous perception of the utilization of a female's voice.⁵⁵⁰

The consequences of Eve's disobedience made plain the importance of a woman's obedience; not just for the sake of her own soul, but for the salvation and security of the souls of those around her.⁵⁵¹ It was a lack of control amongst women which was considered dangerous and threatening and which made them – their utterances and the behaviour – unpredictable. Part of Eve's expected behaviour as a good, obedient wife would have included being submissive to Adam. Eve's initial approach to Adam was itself then a manifestation of spousal disobedience. She should have supported Adam in maintaining a relationship of obedience to God.⁵⁵² When

⁵⁴⁷ Shawn Maddison Krahmer, 'Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux' *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37.1 (2002), 4.

⁵⁴⁸ Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 173; Krahmer, 'Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux', 3.

⁵⁴⁹ It is worthy to note at this point that some theologians thought that having two distinct sexes, males and females, was not part of God's plan. This line of argument states that the two sexes emerged when God was forced Adam and Eve out of Paradise—therefore prior to the fall Adam and Eve were androgynous and it was not until Eve was cursed to be subject to Adam that the division was made (Gen. 3:16). See: Dyan Elliott, 'Gender and the Christian Traditions' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* eds Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2013), 22. See also: John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Idea*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975, 16-19). See also: Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7.

⁵⁵⁰ McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 173.

⁵⁵¹ A. Kent Hieatt, 'Eve as Reason in a tradition of Allegorical interpretation of the Fall' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43 (1980), 221.

⁵⁵² Early church father Jerome preached that a woman of rank and quality should be three things: An obedient daughter, a submissive wife, and a good mother. See: Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker,

instead she convinced Adam to disobey God, she demonstrated how a woman's voice could lead to a cascade of sin – potentially harming both herself and others. As the husband and head of the spousal unit, Adam should have initiated any action that the couple took – sinful or not. Despite this responsibility ultimately lying with Adam, the blame was still seen to rest on the shoulders of Eve who was seen as the source of corruption.

Liz Herbert McAvoy has discussed this perception of the female voice within medieval literature as something to be afraid of, considering occasions when the female voice is described as a 'monstrosity'.⁵⁵³ The monstrous qualities of the female voice are said to lie mainly in the woman's ability, or inability, to control her voice.⁵⁵⁴ The female voice is, then, an issue of personal and individual control by the woman herself. Eve demonstrates this lack of control not only by giving in to temptation but also by then tempting Adam into sin. In short, medieval authors thought that Eve, as Adam's wife, should have known better: she should have demonstrated her obedience to God's command and have encouraged obedient behaviour in her husband, Adam.

Clarissa Atkinson argues that women would naturally have found it easier to relate to Eve as Eve's humanity is more apparent than that of Mary, who was both a virgin and a mother – a paradox which other women would not be able to experience or understand.⁵⁵⁵ However, the shadow of sin that was cast over Eve's legacy made her an unhelpful point of identification for those who were seeking spiritual guidance. They needed to be able to identify with a particular woman could be the reason why

'Introduction' in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), 3.

⁵⁵³ McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 170.

⁵⁵⁴ It is also worth noting that McAvoy brings our attention to the 'disruptive female voice' in the literature of Chaucer's *Canterbury tales*. See: McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 170.

⁵⁵⁵ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 123-4.

there was a shift in popularity from Mary to her mother, St Anne. St Anne was a part of the Holy Family, yet her humanity was much more apparent and resulted in the growing cults of St Anne in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵⁵⁶

One moral, then, which was drawn from the story of Adam and Eve was that women who used unnecessary speech, both in terms of what they said and of when and to whom they said it, opened up an opportunity for more sin. The early Christian theologian, Tertullian, preached that women with ‘open mouths’ were associated with the sin of lust. They were, therefore, capable of corrupting not only themselves but also their potential male victims; as had happened in the Garden of Eden when Eve spoke so fatally to a serpent and then to Adam.⁵⁵⁷ Tertullian further associated ‘open mouths’ and ‘talkative’ women with lust as an inevitable consequence of their general ‘openness’: women who were open in one way would be open in all.⁵⁵⁸ Their unnecessary speech was connected with temptation, and thus there was also a connection with women who spoke and a fear of how their speech led to sexual temptations.⁵⁵⁹ The fifth-century Church Father, Jerome, also feared the influence of women’s sexuality.⁵⁶⁰ The result of an increased focus on female sexuality, and its associated risks, this led to the creation of a paradigm whereby the female voice created a fear of potential lustful temptation, which in turn it created a fear of its part in encouraging and practising sin. Actively practicing silence was considered to be an act of obedience, and a woman who was silent would ensure she was not increasing

⁵⁵⁶ Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 161.

⁵⁵⁷ Joyce E. Salisbury, ‘Gendered Sexuality’ in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), 87.

⁵⁵⁸ Joyce E. Salisbury, ‘Gendered Sexuality’ in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), 87.

⁵⁵⁹ The idea of obedience as it pertains to the female gender is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁵⁶⁰ Salisbury, ‘Gendered Sexuality’, 82. For an important study on Jerome, see: Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 366-386.

temptation – for herself or others – and therefore reducing the risk of individual or collective sinning.

The connection between speech, particularly female speech, and lust, and therefore sin, was to continue throughout the medieval period. Some theologians debated over where the ultimate blame for the introduction of sin into the world rested. Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Cistercian and theologian, argued that Adam and Eve sinned independently of one another and were corrupted by their faults and that the whole of the blame could lie with *either* Adam or Eve.⁵⁶¹ Despite Bernard's statements however, the fall was still generally regarded as beginning with Eve—her curiosity and seduction by the devil created the origin of future sins. Sins were not mutually exclusive: rather they were intertwined because, as dangerous as the female voice could be, the human body itself was also frail and prone to corruption and Christian writers feared that sin could contaminate the rest of society.⁵⁶² Bernard himself 'feared contamination from women'.⁵⁶³ Bernard believed that it would be near impossible to resist sexual temptation from a woman if a man was in her presence for a significant length of time, declaring: 'to be always with a woman and not to have sexual relations with her is more difficult than to raise the dead'.⁵⁶⁴ Is emphasis upon the need to separate male and female may explain his encouragement of particular women in their religious vocations. The connection between 'orality' and sexual temptation is, perhaps, the biggest reason why there was

⁵⁶¹ Shawn Madison Krahmer, 'Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux' *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37.1 (2002), 3-4.

⁵⁶² Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1; McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 175.

⁵⁶³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 145.

⁵⁶⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 145. Sermon 65, par. 4, OB 1:174-5.

such an intense fear of the power female vocal influence could inflict.⁵⁶⁵ The threat of contamination by women began with Eve, but was perpetuated by centuries worth of theologians' preaching.⁵⁶⁶ McAvoy argues that medieval discourses were written in such a way that the 'most acceptable woman tended to be the sealed one whose orifices were closed and therefore less threatening'.⁵⁶⁷ Whilst this could also mean physical enclosure – in a monastery or a hermitage – this did not need to be the case for movements such as *devotio moderna*. The belief that women should remain sealed off from the world did, however, mean that movements such as *devotio moderna* focussed on obedience and control as a means to ensuring that females did not open up the community to sin.

By the fifteenth century, the dangerous female – the contemporary woman not just the Biblical Eve – was a common trope in literature. The female, was used as a didactic tool, displaying the characteristics of disobedience and usually the consequences of that disobedience. Amongst those whose voices were considered potentially dangerous was Bridget. Bridget, outside MS 114, was known for her use, rather than suppression, of her voice. We have already seen that her role of authority, her sanctity and indeed her receipt of revelation made her a liminal and complicated figure. The female saint was in and of herself always a point of risk. Understanding one's self and being self-aware led to a form of independence – without guidance by a man, women were judged to be uncontrollable. Pierre Delooz states: "Sainthood seems to be an important road to the understandings for religious societies and of the

⁵⁶⁵ In an attempt to bring in literature into the discussion McAvoy argues that this was exemplified most strongly with Chaucer's depiction of his Wife of Bath. McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 172.

⁵⁶⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum discusses Bernard of Clairvaux's fear of contamination from women. See: Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 144-5.

⁵⁶⁷ McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 170.

sociability and energetics which provide social groups with cohesion and dynamism.”⁵⁶⁸ In this context, female saints could be particularly dangerous because of the influence that they could impact upon other women – who in turn could endanger the rest of society.

Bridget’s declarations, many set down later in her Revelations, went to the heart of the dispute over the nature of acceptable female speech. Her Revelations circulated throughout Europe not only before her canonization in 1393, but also before her death, in 1373. For the compilers of MS 114, taking into consideration who the intended audience was and what information they wished to portray to this audience was important. This is, very possibly, why those compilers chose to not include Bridget’s Revelations and why they chose to use a slightly abridged version of her *vita*.

Examining some of those revelations – and the reactions to Bridget in parts of her *vita* not included in the version in MS 114 – allows us to see something of the dispute around female authority. Some of these revelations, ironically, involve Bridget instructing men how, and why, they need to master their women and could have been relevant to the manuscript compilers’ theme of obedience including within marriage. It is interesting, therefore, that the compilers chose not to include them. Whilst residing in Rome, sometime during the 1350s, Bridget declared a warning from Christ given in the form of an allegorical story of three men who had all fallen into sin because of women.⁵⁶⁹ Appropriately entitled ‘On Why Woman Should Be Subject to Man’, the first part described a man who was a king, whose lover struck him in the face when he failed to smile at her. Christ tells Bridget: ‘This is because he

⁵⁶⁸ Pierre Delooz, transl. by Jane Hodgkin, ‘Towards a Sociological study of canonized sainthood in the Catholic Church’ in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 212.

⁵⁶⁹ *Revelations*, IV, 84.

was a fool and could not restrain her nor cared about his own honour. He was like a donkey wearing a crown – a donkey because of his foolishness, a crown because of his rank.⁵⁷⁰ The second man was Samson, who, although deemed the strongest of all men, was beaten by a woman because he was unable to master her: ‘he had the heart of a hare since he was unable to master a single woman.’⁵⁷¹ The third man was Solomon, who was said to have more wisdom than most, yet in the end, his downfall came through a woman’s looks: ‘...like a basilisk that kills by a glance but is killed by a mirror.’⁵⁷² The revelation ends with the declaration: ‘Woman must therefore be subject to man.’⁵⁷³ Although this is the conclusion of this revelation, it is noticeable that the three stories concentrate on the actions and faults of the men not the women involved. Bridget Morris notes the irony of this final statement, remarking that this does not entirely make sense in the context of the rest of the revelation, and she suggests that this specific revelation could be meant as a criticism of the Swedish King Magnus’ wife, Blanche.⁵⁷⁴ Yet the revelation does include three different scenarios where a lack of control weakened prominent men. The woman’s dangerous nature is laid out: as in the Garden of Eden, she leads others to their downfall.

Yet the revelation itself still has problems as an example or exemplar of obedience. Although a revelation like ‘Why Woman Should Be Subject to Man’ conforms to common ways of thinking about the relationship between men and women in the medieval period, it is still being distilled and interpreted through the voice of a woman. It therefore invites criticism of Bridget, as speaker and critic of others, just as much as it does of the men about whom the Revelation speaks. It is true

⁵⁷⁰ *ibid*, translation by Denis Searby.

⁵⁷¹ *ibid*.

⁵⁷² *ibid*.

⁵⁷³ *ibid*.

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid*, n. 6. This could, very well, be a criticism on Magnus’s and Blanche’s relationship as Bridget was quite fond of critically advising Magnus and Blanche on a variety of issues.

that Bridget is relating a story she says has been told to her by Christ, but the unease over female discernment and about the source of their stories – whether they came from Christ or the Devil was a matter of debate and concern which we have already met in Chapter One – could lead to continuing uncertainty about the status of the story and Bridget’s own position. For a woman intended as an example of a pious and obedient way of life, the Revelations are a problem. Although Bridget was identified as a representative of ideal feminine behaviour, she had not necessarily practiced what she is being shown to preach. Being a woman of strong personality, who enjoyed getting her own way, and who had a recognised charisma, Bridget had a form of authority which made her influential amongst even the highest echelons of medieval society. A position of such vocal power was normally reserved for the highest male members of society, and as we have already seen in chapter three, Bridget’s position and the fact that she had received the revelations raised challenges of representation. Whoever put down an account of Bridget’s revelations had to confront these challenges if they were to construct her as a truly holy woman. These challenges would in addition have complicated the efforts of the compiler of MS 114 to present Bridget as a pattern for female holy living.⁵⁷⁵ Bridget’s outspokenness helped create the reputation which continues to be reflected in current scholarship. However, her outspoken reputation was also a huge point of contention and fear, especially amongst men who believed that Bridget’s voice was a danger to both society and religion. Bridget’s meddling into the social affairs of the ruling classes did not always earn her favourable opinions or support, and sometimes she was met with hostility and resentment.⁵⁷⁶ Infamously, Eleanor of Aragon, Queen of Cyprus labelled Bridget as

⁵⁷⁵ Jeanette Nieuwland, ‘Birgitta’s View of Marriage: Theory Versus Practice’, in *Birgitta, Hendes Vaerk Og Hendes Klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1990), 88.

⁵⁷⁶ Bridget Morris, ‘Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples an Unlikely Friendship?’ in *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L’Italia. Atti del Convegno di studi itale-svedese Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 10-11*

an ‘ignorant little woman’ when Bridget attempted to advise the queen. Bridget, however, never let the fear of contradicting social norms or presumed rules governing female decorum dictate her actions when it came to encouraging, or criticizing, the actions of others.

The popularity that Bridget’s revelations gained, particularly in the fifteenth century, garnered widespread controversy as learned churchmen discussed and disputed whether or not Bridget, as a woman, had the authority to preach or even to speak.⁵⁷⁷ Bridget’s time as a widow living in Italy and her several pilgrimages placed her, physically, near the seat of spiritual power and thus gave her own spirituality more credence amongst those who later followed her devotions.⁵⁷⁸ Yet although Bridget’s proximity to the Pope increased her fame, her outspokenness, which was sometimes viewed as a threat, spread fear amongst certain religious men. This was a fear not only about what the woman might, or might not, be saying but also about whom she could be influencing through her speech. Churchmen, in particular, were fearful of the female voice as it was they who were responsible for the souls of the laity. Their concern about the dangers of a woman’s speech could thus be seen as a form of pastoral care. However, on another level, women who preached were less

Maggio 2006, eds Olle Ferm, Alessandra Periccioli Saggese, and Marcello Rotili (Napoli: Arte Tipografica Editrice, 2009), 22.

⁵⁷⁷Several articles within MS 114 address Bridget’s divine revelations as legitimate, however of note is Article 2, Master Mathias’ *Prologue*—see chapter two of this thesis. This *Prologue* originally proceeded Bridget’s revelations and addressed the specific issue of claims against Bridget’s legitimacy on the grounds that these divine words would not have been given to a woman. Mathias acknowledges the doubt which people might feel but reassures that the ‘humble and meek in spirit should hear the voice of Jesus Christ’ and because Bridget held these virtues and acted ‘out of obedience to the Spirit’ she received the glory of Christ. MS 114, fos 5v-7v. For a translation see: *Revelations*, Book I, 49. On Bridget’s growing popularity, see: Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 171.

⁵⁷⁸Bridget spent the last twenty-four years of her life away from her homeland of Sweden. Her close proximity to the centre of holy power and to those who were in positions of holy power certainly did not hurt her influence. Bridget’s immediate reason for wanting to make the pilgrimage to Rome was for the celebrations of the Holy Year of Jubilee in 1350. Robert Bartlett, *Why can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 142; Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 93; A&P, 94; Eric Colledge, ‘*Epistola solitarii ad reges*: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Birgittine and Urbanist Propaganda’ *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956), 19-49.

dependent on male churchmen – and, they could take the churchman’s place as the spiritual guide of the lay society. Having women preach in public would have made it harder for the church to regulate their voice – and unregulated preaching could lead to heresy.

Margery Kempe (d. 1438), who used Bridget as a model of spiritual instruction, was tried, more than once, on charges of heretical Lollardy. Although she was found innocent, the case also represents the fear of the female religious voice that pervaded fifteenth century England. As Karma Lochrie points out, Margery can be considered to have been guilty ‘of Lollardy in one respect: she calls into question the antifeminist tradition which forbids women to preach and which further discourages them from reading and interpreting the Gospel.’⁵⁷⁹ Women who preached were feared for possibly corrupting their audience with lustful thoughts, sinful temptation, or heretical ideas.

Margery Kempe also challenged bishops and the higher levels of ecclesiastical society. In a similar way, Bridget was not afraid to criticise popes, but she also challenged secular authorities, including queens and kings. The sources present her as having very clear idea of how a good Christian king should conduct himself – and she was not afraid to be vocally critical of those who fell short of the ideal. In addition to being vocal over a king’s ruling style, Bridget was also known to have had considerable influence on King Magnus of Sweden – specifically when it came to guiding Magnus into living a good life of holy admonitions.⁵⁸⁰ Within the *Acta et Processus* for her canonization, Bridget’s influence upon the King’s behaviour was

⁵⁷⁹ Karma Lochrie, ‘The Book of Margery Kempe: The marginal woman’s quest for literary authority’, *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16 (1986), 42.

⁵⁸⁰ Birger Bergh, ‘A Saint in the Making: St Bridget’s Life in Sweden (1303-1349)’ in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar Third Volume* ed. Francis Cairns, (Liverpool: ARCA, 1981), 375-6.; Also, see: *A&P*, 492.

used as evidence in support of the case for her sanctification. This influence, however, also became a point of envy amongst others in the Swedish nobility as the admiration that King Magnus had for Bridget was well known. Various attempts to embarrass Bridget or to or in some other way demean her in the eyes of the King were described within the *Acta et Processus*.⁵⁸¹

An instance occurred when Lord Nicholas Ingewaldson, a man of influence over King Magnus of Sweden, was fearful of the repercussions of personally offending Bridget. Ingewaldson went to the extent as to have someone pretend to be drunk and approach Bridget as this was the only way Ingewaldson would be able to say ‘scandalous’ things to Bridget and yet not gain the repercussions of performing the actions himself. His own misuse of speech could be justified only with an obvious reason for his lack of control.⁵⁸² The words, however, spoken by the man who was pretending to be drunk are telling: ‘It’s useless to trust in your words,’ he said.⁵⁸³ This story demonstrates that, in the text, Ingewaldson was attempting to classify Bridget as an ‘average’ woman whose speech was untrustworthy, and therefore wrong. Paradoxically, however, the man who was insulting Bridget recognised the *power* of her words and the influence that she held over King Magnus – despite the fact that she was a woman and not a man.

Bridget not only criticized the personal lifestyle choices of secular rulers with whom she came into contact, but also their political decisions. The mid-fourteenth

⁵⁸¹ Of course, it must be acknowledged that the nature of the *A&P* as a source allows for a certain amount of bias in painting Bridget as the victim in these situations. However, these are still a form of court testimonies.

⁵⁸² Bergh, ‘A Saint in the Making: St Bridget’s Life in Sweden (1303-1349)’, 375-6.

⁵⁸³ *A&P* 493. Latin: ‘Vanum est verbis tuis dare fidem’. Birger Bergh translates this phrase slightly differently as ‘It’s folly to trust your words’. While the difference is small, I do prefer my translation as it evokes the idea of ‘nothing’ or ‘emptiness’ being received from Bridget’s words rather than her words being frivolous. I want to extend my thanks to Prof. Philippa Hoskin for discussion on the possible meanings of this phrase. Bergh, ‘A Saint in the Making: St Bridget’s Life in Sweden (1303-1349)’, 376.

century brought several disagreements between the English and French. Bridget's revelations present her as a figure who attempts to broker peace between the warring nations.⁵⁸⁴ Bridget understood that Pope Clement VI, to whom she addressed some of her revelations, supported the French and in reaction to this Bridget took a pro-English stance.⁵⁸⁵ The revelations talk extensively about the warring sides and propose that marriage between the two families would help to bring peace.⁵⁸⁶ Although this did not bring her favour with the French, the English felt that they benefitted from her support. In fact, Bridget continued to play a posthumous role in English-French diplomacy. For example, King Henry V of England chose to use Bridget's revelations as political propaganda in support for his own cause c. 1439.⁵⁸⁷

Bridget's habit of advice giving was not limited to her homeland of Sweden, as was just demonstrated with her actions between France and England, nor was it restricted only to counselling men. During a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1372, Bridget stayed at the court of Queen Eleanor of Aragon, located in Cyprus, where she was treated with 'hostility' and 'derision'. It was on this occasion that she was called an 'ignorant little woman', whilst another critic suggested that she was 'demented' because of the advice she gave to Eleanor.⁵⁸⁸ Bridget's relationship with Giovanna I, Queen of Naples and Sicily, was more amicable.⁵⁸⁹ This friendship seems surprising

⁵⁸⁴ *Revelations* VI 63.

⁵⁸⁵ Bridget's stance against the Pope residence in Avignon could have contributed to her anti-French mentalities. Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 80-1.

⁵⁸⁶ Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 81-2. It is worth noting that marriage as political peace maker could be attributed that led to the friendship between Giovanna and Bridget.

⁵⁸⁷ Henry also established the Birgittine abbey at Syon in 1415. Ellis, "Flores ad fabricandam...coronam": An investigation into the uses of the Revelations of St Bridget of Sweden in fifteenth-century England' *Medium Aevum* 51 (1982), 163-186; Nancy Bradley Warren, 'Kings, Satins and Nuns: Gender, Religion and Authority in the Reign of Henry V' *Viator* 30 (1999), 307-22.

⁵⁸⁸ Bridget Morris, 'Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples an Unlikely Friendship?', 22. For further on Bridget's stay with Queen Eleanor of Aragon see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 126-9.

⁵⁸⁹ Bridget Morris, 'Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples an Unlikely Friendship?' in *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia. Atti del Convegno di studi itale-svedese Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 10-11 Maggio 2006* eds Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese, and Marcello Rotili (Napoli: Arte Tipografica Editrice), 2009, 30.

as Giovanna lived a rather scandalous life – she was married to three different men, and was implicated in her first husband’s murder.⁵⁹⁰ Giovanna’s continuing reputation of being a ‘pleasure-loving’ woman was certainly an attribute that Bridget would have disapproved of – and Bridget was keen to advise the Queen on her lifestyle choices. In this way, Giovanna provides a perfect opportunity to present Bridget as being saintly in her dealings with a woman of dubious reputation. In the revelations, Bridget gives Giovanna fourteen specific pieces of advice, concerning observing confession, reflecting upon marriage, personal debt, contemplation of the Passion, humility and contrition, ensuring peace in her kingdom, and personal appearance.⁵⁹¹ This friendship between two women who could not be more different allows for interesting comparison. On the friendship, Bridget Morris concludes: ‘The relationship between Birgitta and Giovanna shows how women with prophetic voices were taken seriously and listened to in the courts of Europe’.⁵⁹² However, more can be gained from this: Bridget’s friendship with Giovanna further supports the argument that Bridget is presented as not caring who she ‘advised’ as she advised both men and women as well as those seen in high power and those of more meagre livings, presenting her as saintlier. Bridget’s voice is presented as being heard by people of rank such as King Magnus and Queen Giovanna. In both situations, Bridget’s voice was heard regardless of fear, hostility, derision, disagreement, and irrespective of the fact that the ‘advise’ came from a woman. However, although her revelations were accepted by some, her voice was seen as too loud by others, and it was this which created fear and controversy.

⁵⁹⁰ Bridget Morris, ‘Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples an Unlikely Friendship?’, 22-3.

⁵⁹¹ Morris, ‘Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples an Unlikely Friendship?’, 26.

⁵⁹² Morris, ‘Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples an Unlikely Friendship?’, 32.

It was the fear that Bridget's ideas, revelations, and overall voice were in fact a heretical form of preaching which was voiced most often by Bridget's harshest critics. An anonymous detractor, whom Adam Easton addresses in his *defensorium* (Article 6), claimed the text of a rule such as Bridget's could not come from the mouth of God to a woman.⁵⁹³ Such arguments as these were not uncommon, and in fact, it has been argued in recent scholarship that the Church's efforts to establish and maintain control of women and their spiritual lives was an effort to protect male spirituality from female contamination, rather than a way of promoting female salvation.⁵⁹⁴ Easton, an English cardinal, Benedictine monk, and Oxford-educated doctor of theology claimed to owe his freedom to Bridget, who defended him during his imprisonment.⁵⁹⁵ In arguing against Bridget's detractors, Easton said that it was reasonable to believe that Christ gifted such revelations to Bridget and he gives examples of Christ giving similar divine revelations. Easton compares the revelations delivered to Bridget to those granted to St Paul.⁵⁹⁶ He went on to argue that Christ's revelations to Bridget were both appropriate and pleasing to Christ.⁵⁹⁷ Bridget's gift of prophecy, Easton further explained, allowed her to overcome the imperfections of her gender.⁵⁹⁸ He maintained that Bridget always acted in accordance to her sex. It was the divine nature of her revealed words that allowed Bridget to transcend her own sex.⁵⁹⁹ In recent scholarship, there has been much debate over the 'feminist' nature of Easton's arguments about Bridget. Claire Sahlin has addressed the argument and

⁵⁹³ James A. Schmidtke, 'Adam Easton's Defense of St Birgitta', (PhD Thesis, Duke University, 1971), 170. Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 185.; MS 114, fos 24v-49v.

⁵⁹⁴ Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), 28.

⁵⁹⁵ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 183.

⁵⁹⁶ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 185; Schmidtke, 'Adam Easton's Defense of St Birgitta', 178.

⁵⁹⁷ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 183.

⁵⁹⁸ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 183.

⁵⁹⁹ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 39; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 183.

differing in opinions between Hogg and Schmidtke. James L. Hogg argues that Easton is arguing on *behalf* of female prophecy.⁶⁰⁰ Sahlin claims that Schmidtke correctly understands that although Easton is arguing on behalf of Bridget, Easton is upholding the ‘traditional assumptions about women’s inferior nature and the impropriety of women preaching and administering the sacraments.’⁶⁰¹ Hogg fails to credit the point that although Easton is writing in support of Bridget, it is because of Easton’s personal circumstances and not because of any feeling of general support for the female gender as a whole. Easton clearly states that women are held to be inferior to men, however he stresses that Bridget was an exception from the norm of her sex.⁶⁰² In his work, Easton takes great care to differentiate women’s religious roles from men’s, emphasising that women were not only intellectually inferior to men but should be subject to them as well – including Bridget – even whilst his description of Bridget tests gender boundaries.⁶⁰³ Medieval theology maintained that men were associated with intellect while women were associated with the senses – therefore there was an inherent superiority in men.⁶⁰⁴ However, when women spoke words as the mouthpiece of God, it allowed them, even temporarily, to be heard despite any inherent inferiority of their sex.⁶⁰⁵ Even within MS 114 therefore, the complicated issue of Bridget’s voice appears, then, even if it is not clearly addressed within the vita.

⁶⁰⁰ Adam Easton, *Epistola domini cardinalis ad abbatissam et conventum*, in ‘Cardinal Easton’s Letter to the Abbess and Community of Vadstena’ by James Hogg, in *Studies in St Birgitta and the Brigittine Order Volume 2*, ed. James Hogg., (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993), 22.

⁶⁰¹ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 184-5; James A. Schmidtke, ‘Saving by Faint Praise: St Birgitta of Sweden, Adam Easton and Medieval Antifeminism’ *The American Benedictine Review* 33 (1982), 149-61.

⁶⁰² Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 183. Also see: Schmidtke, ‘“Saving” by Faint Praise: St Birgitta of Sweden, Adam Easton and Medieval Antifeminism’, 154.

⁶⁰³ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 183.

⁶⁰⁴ Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 9.

⁶⁰⁵ Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 40.

Bridget's use of her voice in contrast to the accepted pattern of female behaviour, combined with her influence over people of power like King Magnus and Queen Giovanna, meant that she became both a vocal authority figure as well as someone who was feared.⁶⁰⁶ Her influence over the Swedish King led to envy amongst aristocratic men of the court, as is seen with King Magnus, whilst with Henry V of England Bridget's outspoken influence garnered tangible results and the establishment of houses in Bridget's name supporting her personal religious cause. Bridget's conscious placing of herself amongst individuals of power and influence – like King Magnus and Queen Giovanna but also when she placed herself in Rome to name just a few examples – show that she understood the possible power her voice could have in effecting outcomes. Although Bridget does not seem to have practiced obedience, her hagiographers advocated obedience through her, in this way domesticating her to the cultural and religious norms of the period and thereby making her a less threatening figure for the social and religious order.

While Bridget was able to speak out despite being a woman, some women could not do so without being accused of, and tried for, heresy. Margery Kempe was a woman who did look upon Bridget as a spiritual ideal. She made use of Bridget's works as manuals of advice for the behaviour of a spiritual women within medieval society.⁶⁰⁷ Often Margery is discussed alongside Bridget, and for good reason. Margery Kempe was vocally outspoken with what she believed was spiritual revelations. Her spiritual experiences differed from Bridget's, but what is relevant for this context is how Margery's mystical experiences were received. Liz Herbert

⁶⁰⁶ Bergh, "A Saint in the Making: St Bridget's Life in Sweden (1303-1349)", 376.

⁶⁰⁷ Nanda Hopewasser and Signe Wegener, 'Vox Matris: The Influence of St Birgitta's *Revelations* on *The Book of Margery Kempe*; St Birgitta and Margery Kempe as Wives and Mothers' in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, eds Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 61-2.

McAvoy describes Margery's gift as a 'double-edged sword' where on the one hand her gift proved to her, and her followers, the presence of the Holy Spirit, but on the other hand her female voice as a conduit for Christ's words was misunderstood and put her in 'situations of intense danger.'⁶⁰⁸ McAvoy further describes Margery's divine gifts, not only the spiritual revelations from Christ but also the gift of 'uncontrollable crying'.⁶⁰⁹ Here, even Margery's devotional weeping is uncontrollable. For example, on pilgrimage to Canterbury Margery's uncontrollable weeping draws accusations of Lollardy.⁶¹⁰ Margery's inability to control her devotional practice sets her far apart from Bridget, who consciously controlled all of her actions (or, at least, presented as doing so) – whether devotional or not. Despite Margery's use of Bridget's life and works as models, Margery's inability to control her actions made her an unsuccessful mystic.

Control and Silence

Control, then, was the key. It was the virtue which would allow the medieval woman to tread a middle line between inappropriate speech and inappropriate silence (the wish to become a mystic or a hermit could be seen as being just as inappropriate as unexpected or unusual verbalisation). For the late medieval woman, the exhibition of silence was an act of obedience in itself – it was a form of self-control as well as an act of submission. Silence, for both men and women, was an exhibition of control over one's thoughts. Controlling one's thoughts was as important as controlling one's spoken voice. Obedience for a late medieval woman was less about remaining in

⁶⁰⁸ McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 171.

⁶⁰⁹ McAvoy describes this uncontrollable crying as a sign of Margery's singularity, see: McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 171.

⁶¹⁰ Maureen Fries, 'Margery Kempe' in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 221.

complete silence and more about exercising behavioural control over the temptation to speak unnecessarily. Part of the necessary control of the voice for a woman was understanding when one should speak, how one should speak, and what one should say. In addition, this form of control – of thought as well as speech – was central to the work of *devotio moderna* in its encouragement of silent meditation and prayer as a way to discover God’s will.⁶¹¹ Thus it is unsurprising that the stories that were recorded in Bridget’s *vita* in MS 114 include those which demonstrate control of speech, by both Bridget and by those around or related to her. Whilst omitting the revelations which challenged standard views of female vocal control, MS 114 emphasises the ways in which Bridget use of her voice could be depicted as that of a model medieval woman.

The idea of a woman being able to control her thoughts, actions, and speech is first demonstrated in MS 114 in the actions of Bridget’s maternal grandmother, Sigrid, and in including this story, the *vita* portrays such control as an inherited characteristic.⁶¹² The *vita* described Sigrid as ‘hiding her devotions of her mind according to her noble custom and her noble rank’ and because of this, she was ‘despised by a certain nun’.⁶¹³ MS 114 does not elaborate on this, but in Bridget’s full canonical *vita*, we are given slightly more information concerning the anonymous nun: ‘And indeed this nun began, with force, to disparage this same grandmother of the said Lady Birgitta and to murmur with the other nuns.’⁶¹⁴ In both versions of the story, however, the gossiping nun is visited by a ‘wonderful face’ who asks: ‘Why

⁶¹¹ Morimichi Watanabe, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to his Life and to His Times* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1988), 34-5.

⁶¹² Like most of the characters in MS 114’s *vita*, Sigrid is not specifically named. However, we do know Bridget’s maternal grandmother was named Sigrid. Tjader-Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 238 n7.

⁶¹³ MS 114, fo. 54v.

⁶¹⁴ Marguerite Tjader-Harris, Albert Kezel Ryle, and Petrus Olai, *St Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 72.

hast thou despised my maid servant, saying that she was proud which is not true since I shall give to her one daughter and I shall make my covenant and she shall have such grace that she is admired by all.’⁶¹⁵ Neither the full canonical *vita* nor MS 114’s *vita* elaborates what consequences the nun faced. The message, however is clear: the gossiping nun is reprimanded and Sigrid, who understood the importance of not degrading her spiritual self by giving in to the temptation to defend her own honour by joining in inappropriate speech is rewarded with the ‘wonderful face’ which appears to defend her honour.

The anecdote about Sigrid illustrates two important points. First, it shows Sigrid’s obedience to God when she refrains from comment, despite knowing that the nun is unfairly speaking against her. Sigrid takes no measures to defend herself verbally, rather she controls her words and we are told, importantly, that her thoughts too remain silent: she does not engage in appropriate speech even to herself. Secondly, the anecdote illustrates in contrast the disobedient behaviour of the nun. Sigrid shows control while the nun, a woman who has taken vows of obedience to God, gives way to gossip: speech which is clearly inappropriate. The passage breaks down assumptions about the separation between members of the laity and those who have entered Religion, as the nun acts as though tied to worldly desires, whilst the laywoman Sigrid does not. Sigrid demonstrates – as stories about Bridget will later in the *vita* – that a secular, lay path is not necessarily a wrong or sinful way in itself. This anecdote addresses the social tensions that exist between lay individuals and those within the church while also discussing the value of hearing over speaking and its connection to obedience.

⁶¹⁵ MS 114, fos 54v-55r.

The traits that are used to describe Sigrid in the *vita* are those which are generally admired in *devotio moderna*, including humility. Elsewhere in the manuscript Bridget's own humility is emphasised, in Article 2, Master Mathias's *prologue* to the revelations. Master Mathias states that to be able to hear the 'voice' of Christ, you must be both humble and meek as he states Bridget was.⁶¹⁶ As the gossiping nun was neither humble nor meek, she was not able to listen to the voice of Christ, and perhaps as we are not told directly who the wonderful face was, the implication is also that the nun is unable to recognise her as well thanks to her gossip. Sigrid, however, came by her humble and obedient meekness naturally. This anecdote sets out Bridget's heritage as one of practising and understanding vocal control, and it also shows how vows do not necessarily make one more praiseworthy or able to live a more spiritual life. This was an important point for the adherents of *devotio moderna* with their emphasis on avoiding vows when living communal lives under a set rule. Beyond displaying obedient and disobedient behaviour regarding remaining silent, this anecdote clearly illustrates the positive and negative results of various women's actions when they choose to remain silent or speak inappropriately, for example in gossip.

As the *vita* moves from considering Bridget's ancestors to a description of the life and actions of Bridget herself, it develops the theme of control through silence, presenting Bridget as a female exemplar. Throughout, the *vita* is careful to describe Bridget's speech as being performed in and for specific, spiritual, situations. For example, on one occasion Bridget's speech cures a man who is inhabited by the devil.⁶¹⁷ Being able to recognise these specific situations where speech is necessary

⁶¹⁶ MS 114, fo.5vb.

⁶¹⁷ MS 114, fo. 59va.

adds to Bridget's control over her voice. Perhaps it is even intended to be a result of that control which is described as beginning in her infancy. Early in the *vita* Bridget is described as a mute: 'at the end of the third year she began to speak, not babbling but sounding her words perfectly contrary to what was natural at her age.'⁶¹⁸ The title of the anecdote itself states that she is 'as if' a mute and this 'as if' is very important to the point of this story. It is not that Bridget could not talk, rather she chose not to, controlling her voice until she had something worth saying.

At the age of three Bridget was able to sound words 'more perfectly than is usually natural at that age' and the *vita* informs the reader that she already knew how to speak. However, it was not until she had something of merit to say, the content of which is not specified in any version of her *vita* that Bridget decides to end her early silence. Bridget is thus represented as an 'old child' with adult-like qualities and with the ability not only to control her voice but also to understand the social conventions governing when to speak and when to remain silent.⁶¹⁹ When Bridget is presented as a mature/old child, the line is blurred between child and adult. Bridget behaves like a mature female Christian, even as a child, in understanding key aspects of piety and obedience. Additionally, the anecdote reaches beyond this by showing Bridget that had the ability to form her words appropriately and accurately. In a similar fashion to her grandmother Sigrid, therefore, Bridget displays an ability to control her speech, and she does even at a young age, when she is below the accepted age of spiritual understanding. That the *vita* gives no clue as to what Bridget actually said emphasises the point that it is the control of the voice, rather than its use, which matters here.

⁶¹⁸ 'Si fine vero tertii anni sic plene optinuit usum loquendii ut non more infancium loqueretur sed perfecte contra naturam etatis verba resonaret.' MS 114, fo. 55r.

⁶¹⁹ This is an idea that is echoed by Bridget Morris, see: Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 39. Furthermore, the idea of the 'old child' is discussed in Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: the two worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19-47.

Later in the *vita*, although still during her childhood, Bridget is described as having a terrifying vision of the devil, depicted with a ‘hundred hands and feet and deformed in every way’.⁶²⁰ Years later, the *vita* says, Bridget would tell the full story to her aunt, who instructed ‘silence about her vision so that she should be protected by goodness and by faith and so that she should the more intimately love God and beware of all levity.’⁶²¹ Bridget has understood the correct use of speech here, in confiding in an older Christian, and her aunt guides her further in this by instructing her that further speech would be inappropriate. The ordered silence acts as a weapon against the devil and his temptations. The devil then – who is a recurring figure within the Life – also becomes a frequent and important character in the *vita*’s anecdotes about controlling speech. For example, later in the *vita*, during Bridget’s widowhood, in the account of ‘How the devil wanted to deceive her’ the devil uses a man as a conduit for saying ‘horrible things’.⁶²² Bridget can recognise that the man, who is vexed with terrible pain, does not have control over his own actions. As Bridget realises this, the devil causes the man more pain and forces him to blaspheme even more heavily.⁶²³ Finally, Bridget tells the man/devil: ‘be silent devil tongue against God for even if you are this creature’s punisher you shall not be his eternal owner. And at once the man, as if sleeping, fell silent indeed after a few days he was cured.’⁶²⁴ As when Bridget encountered the devil as a child, the *vita* is presenting silence as a successful weapon against the devil and his temptations. In this anecdote, however, unlike the earlier example, Bridget is instructing, and conquering, the devil

⁶²⁰ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁶²¹ MS 114, fo. 55v.

⁶²² MS 114, fo. 58va.

⁶²³ MS 114, fo. 58va.

⁶²⁴ Latin: ‘Sile missus dyabole loqui contra deum tuum que sicut punitor istius creature esses cum non possessor suus eternus et quando homo quasi dormitans siliuit verum diebus aliquibus post ea curatus est.’ MS 114, fo. 58va.

on another's behalf. She undertakes to fight on behalf of one who has not got the ability to exercise control over his speech or actions, and she enforces that control upon him. In particular, it is through silence – through the end of speech which is potentially, and in the case of his blasphemy, actually sinful – that she frees him from possession.

The anecdotes described above are those which directly link speech, particularly uncontrolled speech, with the devil; showing how uncontrolled verbalisation can be a possible abomination against God and the consequences of such speech in the form of the vexing pain that comes from the sin of blasphemy—as well as the fear of the devil's influence through speech. Bridget's contemporary, Catherine of Sienna, had a similar sensitivity to sin that appeared as a state of awareness during prayer and allowed her to smell out the sinfulness in others.⁶²⁵ Like Catherine, Bridget's *vita* shows her to be aware of the devil's influence upon man, and in this case the devil is, literally, the man's tongue. It is important to note, that while in the first story the devil is *attempting* to tempt a woman, Bridget, she can subvert his efforts, whilst in the second tale it is the *man* who succumbed to the devil's possession. This anecdote does not show Bridget as a silent patient, woman; instead, she uses her voice to fight the devil and heal the man. It is her long practised control – from before her third birthday – however which wins her as a widow the ability to exercise this discernment and authority in the text.

During Bridget's youth – or virginity – and her widowhood, the *vita* provides examples which tell of a more active figure with a public voice, proactively defeating the devil. During the years of her marriage, however, the *vita* focuses more heavily on

⁶²⁵ John W. Coakely, *Women, Men and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and their Male Collaborators*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 14.

Bridget's personal devotional behaviours. The loss of Bridget's public voice during her marriage would not have been unusual. As Sally A. Livingston has argued, marriage shrouded women in silence as they became the property of their husbands.⁶²⁶ Livingston's broader argument examines this idea within the context of property ownership. However, her approach can also be applied in a more general sense.

Before the death of Ulf, Bridget's husband, the *vita* stresses that her spiritual career did not inhibit her duties as a wife. After Ulf dies, Bridget is shown to have shifted her full attention and obedience to Christ. Although Bridget is always represented as both an ideal earthly wife and an ideal spiritual Bride of Christ, she understands her place within the gendered hierarchy in her marriage and she exhibits her sense of control by not allowing her fervent piety to interfere with her wifely duties. During the portion of the *vita* dedicated to Bridget's time as an earthly wife, the *vita* chooses to focus on Bridget's behavioural habits as a wife. In the anecdote 'How she prayed and prayer poured out' Bridget's prayer habits are described.⁶²⁷ Bridget prays in a fervent manner, an acceptable use of her voice, but only 'when her husband was absent'.⁶²⁸ Furthermore, when fervently praying, her body's 'genufluxations' (genuflecting) are described as also being 'discipline[d] at all times.'⁶²⁹ These descriptions of her behavioural habits only being fervent when her husband was absent – thus not distracting her from her wifely duties to Ulf – and her body's actions while in prayer as disciplined gives the reader the idea that every action Bridget undertook was controlled. This sense of control is paired nicely with the *vita*'s earlier description of Bridget's youthful muteness. In consideration of the use of the voice, prayer is both a form of speech and a kind of silence. The majority of

⁶²⁶ Sally A. Livingston, *Marriage, Property and Women's Narratives*, (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 2.

⁶²⁷ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁶²⁸ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁶²⁹ Latin: genuflexionibus. MS 114, fo. 56r.

prayer was undertaken in physical silence; however, praying was an important part of exercising one's inner spiritual voice.

Unlike Eve, Bridget had a positive moral influence on her husband. Ulf is said to have relied on Bridget to advise him on spiritual matters, particularly on his choice of devotional readings. Bridget admonished Ulf to read diligently the *Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary*.⁶³⁰ In this way, Bridget and Ulf were, together, able to gain a more fervent love of God. Bridget made controlled and correct use of speech, then, to lead her husband and develop their mutual devotion and love for God, thereby establishing her spiritual maturity. Ulf too is contrasted to the uncontrolled, demon-possessed blasphemer who offers not prayers but curses to God. In a further exercise of control, Bridget convinced Ulf to spend the last years of their marriage in chastity. Her chaste marriage can be contrasted to that of Margery Kempe, who in an attempt to emulate Bridget's spirituality, also lived a portion of her marriage in chastity. Margery's approach was different from Bridget's, as she used chastity as a way to avoid responsibility for marital debt.⁶³¹ Furthermore, Margery's marital chastity only occurred after years of begging her husband, which involved gaining limited clerical approval to enter into what is described as 'contractual widowhood'.⁶³² In contrast Bridget and her husband reached a mutual decision whereby Bridget was able to persuade her husband to live in marital chastity, presumably again with a careful and correct use of words.

Along with her fervent prayer, Bridget practiced daily confessions to her 'most experienced' master confessor, who himself was devoted to prayer.⁶³³ While MS 114 does not specify who this confessor was, in other versions of the *vita* the

⁶³⁰ MS 114, fo. 56v.

⁶³¹ Livingston, *Marriage, Property and Women's Narratives*, 2.

⁶³² Fries, 'Margery Kempe', 233.

⁶³³ MS 114, fo. 56r.

confessor in this story is named as Master Mathias, the author of Article 2, the *prologue* to Bridget's revelations.⁶³⁴ Bridget's confessional voice is a sign of her 'future grace' in that she 'laments sins more gravely than others...and she holds back nothing in her words or behaviour unexamined.'⁶³⁵ The confessor, significantly, mentions that Bridget 'holds back nothing in her words and behaviour undiscussed.'⁶³⁶ What the confessor is saying is that Bridget vocally divulged everything to him, an important demonstration of her true obedience to him. This, then, shows that there were acceptable times for women to talk, even to talk at length and in detail. When with her confessor, a woman was allowed to speak freely. This space with the confessor was supposed to be one of safety and confidence and where full speech was a necessity. Anything that was said between Bridget and any of her confessors remained confidential. Therefore, there was no, or little, chance of any words Bridget said being a threat to anyone outside of the confessional. Rather silence, holding back confession of sin, was here a danger to Bridget's own soul. Confession in the *vita*, like all medieval confession was meant to be an intimate human relationship, and a meaningful part of Christian spiritual obedience.⁶³⁷ Bridget had deeply personal relationships with several confessors throughout her life. Often, women also knew about their confessors, on many occasions women could pass on knowledge of the life and habits of their close confessors after his death.⁶³⁸ Bridget's

⁶³⁴ For a version of the *vita* which specifies Mathias's name, see: Tjader-Harris, *St Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, 74.

⁶³⁵ MS 114, fo. 56r.

⁶³⁶ MS 114, fo. 56r-b.

⁶³⁷ Pierre J. Payer, 'Confession and Study of Sex in the Middle Ages,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* eds Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 2000), 3.

⁶³⁸ This is seen with the Dominican Hendrik van Leuven and the Beguine Petrissa, she was able to inform the devotional authors of *Miracula fratris Henrici de Calstris* Hendrik's spiritual habits after his death. Wybren Scheepma, 'Hendrik van Leuven: Dominican, Visionary, and Spiritual Leader of Beguines' in *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500*, eds Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 278-9.

habits point out that she lamented her sins in confession ‘more gravely than others’.⁶³⁹ In doing so, the source separates Bridget from ideas of average behaviour, and instead depicts her of practicing ‘fervent’ behaviour – a word the *vita* uses to describe Bridget several times to illustrate her obedient actions.

In the same way that the *vita* presents Bridget’s ability to utilise silence as a quality inherited from her grandmother, Bridget’s confessional habits are also outlined early in the *vita* as familial. The first reference to confession is that practised by Bridget’s father, who is described as devout and just, and who is said to have humbly confessed his sins every Friday: ‘On Fridays I want to prepare myself for God so that on other days I am ready to bear what God sends.’⁶⁴⁰ This is the first recorded use of voice by any figure within the *vita*, emphasising the high importance placed on both Bridget’s father and also on his habit of regular confession. The *vita* associates avid confession with the qualities of humility, justice, devoutness, and an aspect of spiritual nobility. In the same way, confession and self-examination were of central importance to the *devotio moderna* movement.⁶⁴¹ By associating the habit of regular and pious confession with Bridget’s father, the *vita* creates the connection that confession is an important behaviour for not only women, but also for men—it is expected of all obedient Christians. Furthermore, as with Sigrid, this episode sets up Bridget’s spiritual heritage, this time from her father’s side.

Later, the *vita* continues to emphasise the importance of confession and Bridget’s understanding of it when she encourages an anonymous brother to partake in confession. This anecdote, ‘About a brother who lay in bed for three years and more’, shows similar patterns to Bridget’s encounter with the man whose tongue was

⁶³⁹ MS 114, fos 56rb.

⁶⁴⁰ MS 114 fos 54vb.

⁶⁴¹ MS 114, fo. 54va-b.

possessed by the devil. Bridget instructs this brother to repent his sins because ‘something is hiding in your heart that as long as you keep hidden you will not be able to die’.⁶⁴² The brother responds that he is hiding nothing but has disclosed everything and made penance for it. However, on further prodding the brother dissolves into tears saying, or unofficially confessing, to Bridget he is carrying around a secret sin which he has never dared speak: ‘I have never dared to confess this, about which as many times as I made confession my tongue was if tied and now such shame has invaded me that I could not open my mouth.’⁶⁴³ It is Bridget’s vocal encouragement, expressly said to be commanded by God, to confess which releases the ill brother from his suffering. Here Bridget is almost acting as a priest, following the instructions in confessional manuals of the period to the priest to urge full revelation of sin from the penitent. This should not be pushed too far: Bridget, importantly, does not receive the confession, and the details of the man’s sins are not given in the *vita*. Rather, she understands the appropriateness of her position and having brought him to understand the proper use of speech in this context, ensures he confesses to the right person – the priest.

Although this anecdote focuses on confessional habits, Bridget’s role in the man’s devotional practices is similar to her role in the earlier anecdote ‘How the devil wanted to deceive her’, discussed above.⁶⁴⁴ In both anecdotes there are men plagued by unfortunate circumstances: one with the devil’s possession and another with a physical illness. In addition, in both situations it is Bridget who instructs and informs the unfortunate men how to overcome their illness. In both instances, that illness is being brought about by a lack of control, or its inappropriate application allowing the

⁶⁴² MS 114, fo. 59r.

⁶⁴³ MS 114, fo. 59r.

⁶⁴⁴ The latter anecdote occurs on MS 114, fo. 58v.

devil access to the man's soul or body. When paired together, the two anecdotes detail when the voice needs to be silenced – to ward off the devil's possession – and when a person should voice everything – in confession. The two anecdotes had the potential to provide a significant pattern of devotional behaviours for both men and women.

Bridget's youth and her marriage were in themselves an exercise of obedient control, recognising her position as a woman and understanding of acceptable conduct. Her widowhood allowed her to fully embrace her divine vocation, acting as the channel and Bride of Christ.⁶⁴⁵ As a widow she was able to cure a man of the devil's possession and encourage an ill man to cure his soul with confession. Significantly, Bridget's widowhood was also the time when she received her divine revelations. MS 114 does not record any of Bridget's revelations, however, the *vita* does recall when Bridget received her first revelation. That revelation is identified as occurring not while she was asleep, but while she was awake in prayer; again, this emphasises the importance of the prayer voice.⁶⁴⁶ Here, the *vita* is indicating that one must be in the position to listen and hear to receive divine words.⁶⁴⁷ This parallels the anecdote of Sigrid and the gossiping nun. The nun is only able to hear the 'wonderful face' while sleeping – her inappropriate speech in gossiping prevents her from receiving the vision while awake. Furthermore, both the revelation anecdote and the gossiping nun show the connection between silence and listening. Also importantly, they demonstrate the extent to which Bridget learnt control across her lifetime. As she advanced in the ability to control herself, she was increasingly able to exercise proper discernment.

⁶⁴⁵ MS 114, fo. 57r; Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 172.

⁶⁴⁶ MS 114, fo. 57r.

⁶⁴⁷ Master Mathias also implores the importance of being able to hear the 'voice' of Christ earlier in MS 114. MS 114, fo. 27r-v.

Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that from the twelfth century onwards there was a ‘discovery of self’.⁶⁴⁸ This concept evolves with the subsequent centuries through the medieval era. Understanding the ‘individual self’ is key to understanding why widows were particularly feared. Widowhood was a unique stage for women where they, for the first time in their life cycle, were not under the authoritarian control of a man. The discovery of one’s self is echoed in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux who stressed the discovery of ‘self and self-love’.⁶⁴⁹ This twelfth-century awareness of the complexity of an individual’s inner life and the discovery of the *homo interior* – or the discovery within oneself of human nature – is the development of the self toward God.⁶⁵⁰ This self could, as earlier noted, be dangerous: but for those who had learnt control, it could be depicted as being of great spiritual advantage. The widow was able to use the discovery of her own individual self—which could be most strongly felt once a widow – to connect with God.

Conclusions

Late-medieval women were encouraged to be ‘engaged listeners’ rather than active speakers within the church and in other religious settings. Preaching was categorized as a ‘male profession’.⁶⁵¹ When women did feel a need to speak about belief and behaviour, in a manner which could otherwise be called ‘preaching’, it was necessary that they place themselves, or were set by someone else, into an accepted niche where they could speak whilst still being considered orthodox. By continuing to exclude women from any preaching or teaching positions, churchmen were

⁶⁴⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 82-109.

⁶⁴⁹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 86.

⁶⁵⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 86-7.

⁶⁵¹ Beverly Mayne Kienzle, ‘Margherita of Cortona: Women, Preaching, and the Writing of Hagiography’ *Medieval Sermon Studies* 54 (2010), 40.

reinforcing the ‘maleness’ of their profession and implying a gendered bias to preaching.⁶⁵²

In these circumstances, where the female voice was understood as dangerous and to be feared, the need for women to be identified, and to self-identify, with the concept of obedience through female silence intensified. Saints, in particular, were important tools for the Church in enforcing this image, as they served the function of connecting lay society with the divine.⁶⁵³ Being a saint gave a woman an acceptable platform from which to speak – and this was Bridget’s platform. The saints made up many of the female models that appeared in didactic religious literature and which helped lay society to understand, value and emulate obedient behaviour. In part, this is what made female religious models particularly powerful figures.⁶⁵⁴ Fifteenth-century women were encouraged to feel that they could identify with Bridget’s life experiences – in all her various roles within the female life-cycle which other women would have also experienced: those of daughter, wife, mother, and widow. This was part of what made Bridget an influential saint and it was this potential to have an influence an important, and supposedly dangerous, section of society – women – which made her, too, potentially dangerous.

Furthermore, as a popular saint, and as a woman who undertook the roles of daughter, wife, mother, and widow, Bridget was able to influence and guide others

⁶⁵² The idea of the ‘maleness of Christ’ by excluding women from preaching is discussed in: Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, ‘Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Woman in Medieval Theology’ in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 213-260.

⁶⁵³ Robert Bartlett discusses the need for saints’ cults as a connection between lay society and the church, particularly in times of cultural transformation such as the Black Death which Bridget lived through and the after effects would have been felt at the time MS 114 was compiled. See: Bartlett, ‘Rewriting Saints’ Lives’, 598-9.

⁶⁵⁴ Pierre Delooz has famously stated that ‘saints are saints for other people’ this is particularly true when considering the potential, dangerous influence a female saint could impart onto a lay audience. See: Pierre Delooz, ‘Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church’ transl. Jane Hodgkin in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History* ed. Stephen Wilson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 197.

towards experiencing and practising an obedient way of life. She was able to fill that societal need for an obedient female model with whom a lay audience could identify. The incredible popularity that Bridget, as a saint, experienced demonstrates the importance of identifying female characteristics with a more tangible model and produced a societal paradigm where sanctity begins to breach passed a world of deceased by continuing to creep into the world of the living to better serve the laity.⁶⁵⁵

Throughout the *vita*, Bridget is shown as understanding her limits as a woman with a spiritual vocation. Bridget is carefully portrayed, in MS 114 and elsewhere, as a figure with the ability to connect lay society with the divine through her personal examples.⁶⁵⁶ Bridget is depicted as not only demonstrating obedience in general, but in particular as showing an understanding of vocal control. Bridget shows how not only silence is a mark of obedience, but that she also knows the opposite: when it is deemed acceptable, even necessary, for a woman to speak. MS 114 makes it clear that control of speech is something which should be learnt as a girl, that it must be practised as a wife, when public utterance is not acceptable, and that for a woman such as Bridget, who has learnt that control, it is possible, as a widow, to be used as a conduit for Christ, and to speak publically and with authority over men and the devil. At this stage Bridget is depicted as having full control over her voice, and a complete understanding of the times of silence and times of speech.

The *vita* sets out Bridget's childhood and describes Bridget's muteness as a child – attesting to her understanding early in her youth. Her attentiveness to prayer and confession are two ways Bridget is shown to have been obedient in speech.

⁶⁵⁵ The significance of having a figure 'more tangible' is in reference to being able to identify with a figure closer to the actual physical laity—in contrast to the Virgin Mary. Although the Virgin was always and undoubtedly spiritually significant, the fourteenth century brought several bouts of various forms of strife that increased the effectiveness of those figures similar to Bridget who battled similar forms of strife, which made that figure seem more real, and therefore tangible.

⁶⁵⁶ Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 170.

Furthermore, Bridget is depicted as, literally, a bridge between the two worlds, of spiritual guide and frail, female humanity. On the one hand, the Bridget is shown as human through her behavioural habits – behavioural habits which every obedient Christian should possess, but Bridget is described as exhibiting them exceptionally. On the other hand, as in the stories in the life concerning a man possessed by the devil and an ill brother, Bridget is shown to be a spiritual guide, leading both men back from misfortune back onto the spiritually correct path.

Despite the careful construction of Bridget and her voice in MS 114, and elsewhere, her role as Christ's bride and channel was often challenged. The strongest argument that detractors had against Bridget's legitimacy as a saint and spiritual leader was that God would not have given a *woman* the authority to speak out in the way Bridget did. Amongst the Bridget-specific articles in MS 114, there are a significant number which defend God's choice to give a woman, Bridget, these particular gifts of inspired speech. In connection with this idea of spiritual female authority, Rosalynn Voaden astutely states that 'theological attitudes towards women derived from two main convictions: first, that women are by nature corporeal, sensual, and carnal, and second, that all women bear the taint of Eve.'⁶⁵⁷ These attitudes, then, shaped the spiritual lives of both sexes.⁶⁵⁸ There is also something to be said concerning the personal anxiety medieval individuals felt. Both lay and religious had cause to feel a certain amount of envy over the spiritual and personal accomplishments of Bridget. Bridget was able to achieve her spiritual calling without sacrificing her lay life. This type of envy and anxiety over Bridget's ability to manage

⁶⁵⁷ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 7.

⁶⁵⁸ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 9.

two worlds without letting one slip also was a reason to incite guilty consciousness in others.⁶⁵⁹

Bridget is depicted as having control over her voice at even the youngest age. This control lasts throughout her life and anecdotes within the *vita* show how Bridget handled various situations of speaking, ultimately providing obedient examples of when a woman should speak while also providing the readers with moments of silence and the benefits that come with it. Both real-life and *vita* Bridget encouraged lives of spiritual obedience – the key difference is that the *vita* shifts Bridget into line with the norm of a traditionally obedient woman. This control is, too, of vital importance for the manuscript's role within the *devotio moderna* movement. For these patterns of obedience, coupled with silence and the ways in which they guide men and women to prayer and self-examination and meditation, and therefore to God, were central to the movement and thus Bridget's life as set out in her *vita* in MS 114 is an important form of spiritual guide and blueprint for the reader or listener.

⁶⁵⁹ Bergh, 'A Saint in the Making: St Bridget's Life in Sweden (1303-1349)', 376.

Conclusion

Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript MS 114 provides a pattern of pious female behaviour which focuses upon control. This thesis has demonstrated how that control is expressed through two important themes: those of chastity and of obedience, with Bridget demonstrating control of her sexuality and of her voice and speech. In a close consideration of the *vita* of St Bridget of Sweden contained within the manuscript, in the context of other works also in this compilation concerning Bridget, we have seen how Bridget is shown to approach the different life cycle experiences of the medieval laywoman and how she demonstrates her own control in each case.

Bridget's life, as mediated through her *vita* in MS 114, emphasises her spiritual discipline. As a child and as a young woman before marriage Bridget receives her first visions, and is offered a crown by the Virgin Mary which she accepts: but which is later found not to be the crown of virginity but rather of a different form of chastity. She demonstrates her ability to pray against hideous demons and a direct relationship with Christ whom she tells her aunt that she sees as she prays. As a child, her control is also demonstrated in her speech. It is clear from the *vita* that she obeys her aunt's instructions not to speak of her visions to others – it is not until her widowhood that she enters upon the recording of her Revelations. She also demonstrates perfect control at the earliest age when, as she learns to speak, she is said not to have 'babbled' as children do – in an uncontrolled manner of speech – but to have remained silent until able to speak in a full and considered way. Thus, she was able both to speak and to keep silent from her earliest days.

Her marriage was in itself a form of obedience – one which, for a woman of Bridget's demonstrated spiritual gifts would have put her in contrast to such holy

examples as Christina of Markyate, who fought her parents' attempts to have her marry and eventually fled her home to live in a hermitage. Bridget accepts her family's choice of husband and we are told of no demure. Yet within this marriage Bridget is once more shown to have demonstrated control. She is said to have been able to persuade her husband to enter into a chaste – so sexless – marriage both in the first year of their marriage and after the birth of her children. For Bridget, appropriate sexual behaviour was built very much around the birth of children – a view reflecting St Augustine and theologians who were Bridget's own contemporaries – and that this was an acceptable form of female chaste expression is demonstrated by the continued protection of the Virgin Mary. Although Bridget has not accepted the crown of chastity which the reader of the *vita* may have thought Mary offered to her as a girl, Mary, we are told, returns to help and save her during a difficult child birth. Bridget's control as a wife extends to her use of her voice personally as well as publically. That she persuades her husband into a chaste marriage with none of the opposition that Margery Kempe's book will suggest that her request was in apposite as well as persuasive words. She demonstrates control in other ways also – notably in her fasting to reduce bodily appetites – but she is careful in her use of prayer, reserving times of prayer, the *vita* says, to those occasions when her husband is absent and she will not disrupt the household. So, she can remain spiritually as well as physically silent when necessary. Nevertheless, she understands the occasions when speech is an important spiritual exercise, holding back no sins in her regular confessions. Confession is a practice in which she is assiduous, even more so than her father whose holiness is recorded at the start of the *vita*.

As a widow, Bridget enters upon a new stage in chastity once more as a bride. Like the biblical Judith, in her widowhood Bridget was able to devote herself

completely to God as the bride not of man but of Christ.⁶⁶⁰ Following her husband's death, the *vita* tells us that Bridget grieved over her state and was anxious over the loss of her virginity, but was comforted and reassured by Christ, who appeared to tell her not to be afraid because she was his 'bride and channel.'⁶⁶¹ From that moment forward, Bridget would hear and see spiritual things, and through his spirit she would be given divine directions.⁶⁶² It was after this reassurance that Bridget received her first revelation.⁶⁶³ Soon after this moment, she was instructed to join a certain monastery.⁶⁶⁴ Whilst living there at the monastery, Bridget received several more revelations assuring her that she would be given 'understanding of spiritual things' from Christ through which she would gain greater holiness.⁶⁶⁵ The continued value of vocal control for the pious woman is also demonstrated through this story. The widowed Bridget is said to have been sent by divine instruction to a monastery, where silence would have been a vital part of spiritual practice. This focus on spiritual silence enabled her to make proper use of her voice in the expression of her Revelations.

In her practice of all these virtues and her practice of personal control Bridget is shown to be the opposite of the dangerous woman, Eve, and instead to demonstrate the virtues of her protector and patron, the Virgin Mary in the theology of the late Middle Ages. Where Eve's general lack of control lead her to listen to the serpent in the garden of Eden, and her ill-judged use of her voice tempted Adam to sin, introducing lust and so sexual sin to the world, Mary's obedient yes to the virgin birth

⁶⁶⁰ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 172.

⁶⁶¹ MS 114, fos 56v-57r.

⁶⁶² MS 114, fo. 57r.

⁶⁶³ The manuscript dates this first revelation as occurring in 1344, MS 114 fo. 57r.

⁶⁶⁴ MS 114, fo. 57r.

⁶⁶⁵ MS 114, fo. 57r.

both demonstrated right use of her voice and countered the sexual sin of the first mother. Bridget too is shown as having countered fears of the female voice and of the female as temptress. Fears of the female voice and its undisciplined use, and doubts about the weak and sexually uncontrolled woman as spiritual leader are found elsewhere in MS 114, particularly in the first half of the manuscript. There discussion of her sex and her voice, by Alonso of Jaén and by her confessor Master Mathais – who himself had the opportunity to oversee the ‘vocal obedience’ necessary for Bridget in confession reveals the tension between Bridget’s life and expression and the expectations of, and fears around, the behaviour of the late medieval woman.

This also marks a contrast between the Bridget of MS 114, particularly as expressed in the *vita*, and the St Bridget of the well-known Revelations, whose speech – although always attributed by her and later by her confessor to Christ’s inspiration – leads others to challenge her willingness to make political comments and to reprimand queens, kings and popes. On at least one occasion in those Revelations she is told that she is speaking inappropriately and should be silent. Yet the *vita* gives an impression of a far more submissive, in fact the ideal pious, lay woman, In Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript MS 114 St Bridget of Sweden is depicted as a model of total, female obedience. What is the reason for this difference? Exploring this brings us to the heart of the purpose of the manuscript we have considered here.

MS 114 is a manuscript made up of nineteen different articles. As a compilation, however its gathering was intentional and completed in one piece. The nineteen articles have been arranged in two nearly equal halves. These two manuscript halves are distinguished by scribal hand, subject matter, and physical layout. Although the scribal hands of the two halves are similar, there is a noticeable difference. Furthermore, margin notes in the first scribal hand appear in the second

half of the manuscript. This suggests that the first scribe checked the work of the second half. Proof of the simultaneous existence of these two scribes supports this thesis's argument that MS 114 was compiled for the purpose of being read as a single manuscript, rather than a haphazard compilation of random texts.

What, then, is this compilation made up of? The first half (Articles 1-10) is made up of texts concerning Bridget of Sweden herself. The *vita* appears to be the focus of this, but articles include prayers for her feast day and the works mentioned above, composed around the time of her canonization, and which refer to her relationship with Christ and the veracity and acceptability of her revelations. The second half – made up of sermons, and of extracts from patristic works – seems at first site to be without form, but on closer inspection focuses around the subjects of obedience, control, chastity and their related virtue, humility. Previous research has considered the manuscript as an object of English Birgittine devotion. Earlier scholars have, mistakenly, assumed its modern English location was synonymous with its original location of compilation. Initially, this argument seems plausible: MS 114 contains notable Birgittine texts by English Cardinal Adam Easton, it currently resides in Lincoln, England, and fifteenth-century England was known to have Birgittine religious houses. However, this thesis has, conclusively, proven why these previous assumptions about MS 114 were mistaken and it is in the true context of this manuscript that the remaking of Bridget as submissive wife and mother and dutiful widow must be considered.

The manuscript is from the Netherlands, where Dean Honywood purchased it in the seventeenth century, bringing it back to England at the end of his exile abroad. Both that purchase, and the scribal hands of the manuscript, reveals its provenance. Furthermore, the varying dates attributed to the manuscript, from the late fourteenth

to the end of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, can also be demonstrated to be based on only a limited reading of its contents. It can now be dated to the early fifteenth century. These conclusions place the manuscript within the right time and place to be a *devotio moderna* piece.

The movement of *devotio moderna*, took place throughout the Low Countries from the late fourteenth century and lasting until the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.⁶⁶⁶ This was a period of change and development after the difficulties of the Black Death, with Europe caught in political turmoil whilst, by contrast, trade – particularly in the Low Countries – grew and along with it literacy and the transfer of ideas, was characterized by a rise of lay piety.⁶⁶⁷ Late medieval piety was an affective and somatic experience – largely focusing on the imitation of Christ framed by Christ’s physical suffering.⁶⁶⁸ *Devotio moderna* utilised the idea of affective piety, focusing on Christ’s humanity as a model for what a religious and truly pious life should necessitate. It further bridged both lay and religious societies by not mandating official vows. The movement was founded by Master Gerard Grote, the Dutch cleric and theologian of the late fourteenth century who was convinced that the Church and Society had lost its way. His enthusiasm for religious purity as expressed in the communal life which he had seen amongst monastic orders, from the Carthusians to the Augustinians, led him to promote a life of simplicity and to open his own house to poor and unmarried women to live in community. This was the start of the movement of lay sisters who were the backbone of the movement. His preaching – one of his

⁶⁶⁶ John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 5.

⁶⁶⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 3-4.

⁶⁶⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 3-4, 13-18.; Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in the Late Medieval Hagiography: speaking the Saint*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

famous sermons is included in the second part of MS 114 – spread the movement, and although he himself did not live to see the full strength of the movement he had established an enthusiasm which was followers were able to take and grow.

Devotio moderna was known for its emphasis on literacy and on the production and reading of books. Once it was an established movement it would encourage the use of books in the vernacular, but in its early years – when the majority of its members were the clergy seeking ways to guide the laity in the movement's accepted virtues – it made use of work in Latin. MS 114, dating to the early fifteenth century would be a very early example of a *devotio moderna* text. It does, however, demonstrate many of the later concerns of the movement. The monastic virtues of obedience, chastity and humility were all central to the movement and expected to be practiced by laity as well as by clergy. Within its communities, and amongst the many laity who lived outside them, silence, the correct use of the voice, was emphasised. In its later years *devotio moderna* made use of sister books to guide its female lay members. These texts provided the patterns of individual sister's lives up to their deaths, providing exemplars of good living for their readers. In the early years of the movement, no such exemplars would have been available. MS 114 suggests that one answer was to turn back to female saints and particularly to a local and recent female saint, just as those women in the sister books would be both recently dead and local to their readers. There is little evidence elsewhere of use being made of St Bridget by *devotio moderna*, but this perhaps is an area for future study.

Lincoln Cathedral MS 114 is substantial, both physically and in terms of its content. It demonstrates the importance for the movement of *devotio moderna* of the virtues of chastity and obedience. It provides a real lived example of a Christian life for women to emulate at every stage of their life cycle. Within this example, perhaps

most importantly of all, MS 114 provides a form of encouragement for lay women wishing to enter a lay-religious, devotional life style. In this way, women were able to compare their day – to – day life to that of Bridget, and through her to make a connection on a spiritual level to the Virgin Mary. The construction of Bridget as a literary character within MS 114's *vita* has been particularly important in considering the values set down in this manuscript. It is here that Bridget's life cycle is detailed with anecdotes of her gender and vocal obedience. Through this compiled manuscript, we can gain a better understanding of what a religious movement of the fifteenth century desired in an early fifteenth century female lay adherent.

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